

Religion & Liberty

A black and white photograph of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. The statue of Abraham Lincoln is seated on a large pedestal, surrounded by tall classical columns. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights. In the upper right corner, there is a faint inscription on the wall: "IN THIS TEMPLE FOR WASHINGTON OF THE PEOPLE THE MEMORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN IS ENSHRINED FOREVER".

SUMMER 2022

Neo-Calvinism and Religion in the Public Square

JESSICA JOUSTRA

Civic Education and American Renewal

GREG WEINER

Art Will Find a Way

JOSEPH BOTTUM

Faithfulness Is the Future of the Church

CARL TRUEMAN

A Vision of Black Success

IAN ROWE

RESTORE, RECLAIM & RENEW

Religion & Liberty

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The Issue This Time

“It is easier to bear what’s amiss than go about to reform it.”

—Thomas Fuller, *Gnomologia*

The enormity of the dysfunction in our republic and the disharmony of its citizens make the task of restoring, reclaiming, and renewing America seem unrealizable. But that is our theme.

One would expect a radical approach to the nation’s ills from those on the left, but boisterous types on the right have also begun looking fondly to authoritarian solutions. How many “conservative” folks have I heard in the past few years declaim that *the whole system has to burn*, and this because it was supposedly defective from the start. As for *reformation*, it’s one of those terms with both positive and negative connotations, depending on the auditor. In religion it points to a time of repristination, at least for Protestants; more of a revolt for Catholics and Orthodox. In politics, it can be either hope for greater responsibility to the taxpayer or just a weasel word deep staters use to safeguard the status quo.

The issue this time: restoring, reclaiming, and renewing—in short, *reform*, because burning to the ground and ripping up by the roots is the calamitous work of radicals and revolutionaries, not conservatives. In the words of British statesman Edmund Burke as quoted by Greg Weiner: “Even when I changed, it should be to preserve. I should be led to my remedy by a great grievance. In what I did, I should follow the example of our ancestors. I would make the reparation as nearly as possible in the style of the building.”

So reform means to trust that the foundations of our republic are fundamentally sound and that the U.S. Constitution, if interpreted rightly and given teeth, will prove both a guardrail against intrusions into spheres of personal and local sovereignty and the preserver of the civil rights necessary for human flourishing. And we do mean *human* flourishing, not merely the flourishing of those most nimble in reducing everything to executive or judicial power.

A rekindling of the moral imagination is suggested as a way forward in more than one essay in this issue of *Religion & Liberty*. The more we look to centralized, concentrated power for solutions to human problems, the sooner we humans will become problems ourselves, waiting to be solved by administrators, jailers, and “experts” in lab coats. Imagination—moral, entrepreneurial, artistic, pedagogical—will prove in the long run more potent in addressing the chaos and decline of our institutions and broader culture than any president’s pen, confiscatory tax scheme, or legal apparatus for brutalizing one’s enemies.

I quoted Thomas Fuller up top. He was an 18th-century British writer and physician, also known for a book of adages that gave us such familiar bywords as “Better late than never,” “Enough’s as good as a feast,” and “Spare the rod and spoil the child.” I leave you with one more: “It is my own fault if I am deceived by the same man twice.”

Here’s to some old-fashioned reform.

—ANTHONY SACRAMONE

P.S. You will no doubt have noticed that *Religion & Liberty* looks a little different this time around. We hope you enjoy our redesign, the work of some highly talented publishing professionals, two of whom deserve special attention: Jessica Hogenson and Jaclyn Boudreau. Thanks, J&J!

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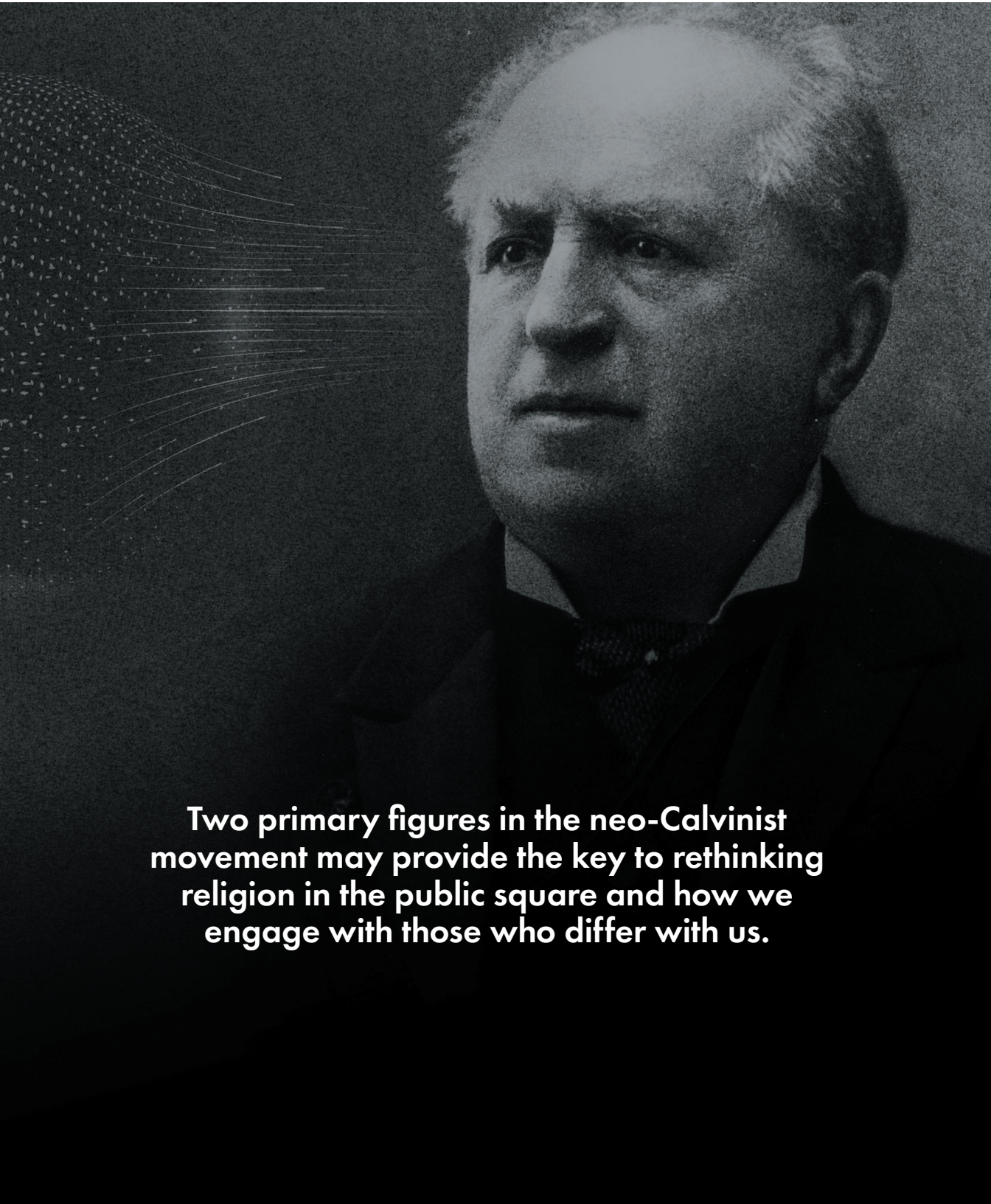
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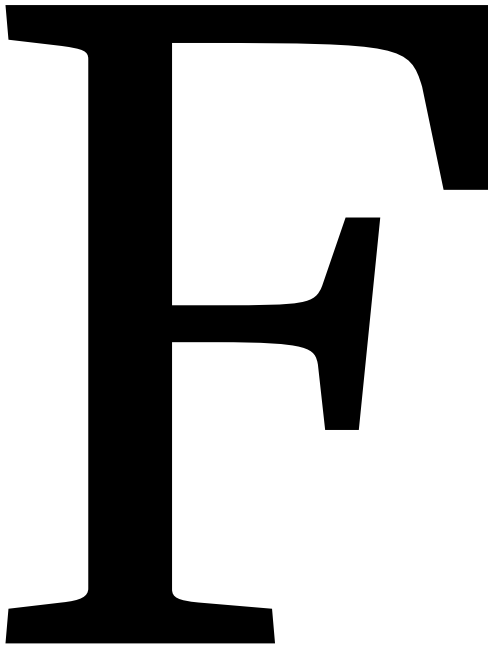


ANTI- REVOLUTIONARIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by JESSICA JOUSTRA



Two primary figures in the neo-Calvinist movement may provide the key to rethinking religion in the public square and how we engage with those who differ with us.



FRACTURE AND FRAGMENTATION border on cliché in the struggling pluralist democracies of the world, the United States fore among them. We are beset with our differences, amplified and exaggerated as they may be by the echo chambers of our own design, many a product of the technologies of connection that once seemed to hold so much promise to overcome our tribal polarizations. Pessimism is the rule as we slide into the twin dystopias of Alexis de Tocqueville's famous extremes, of self-centered individuals turning inward to our own journeys of authenticity, and overreaching politics desperately trying to pull back together our fraying social fabric.

Calvinism, particularly the late 19th- and early 20th-century Dutch Calvinist movement known as neo-Calvinism, is not the obvious answer to anyone. But I want to argue in this essay that to answer de Tocqueville's twin pathologies requires not just a renaissance of social solidarity and of Burkean platoons, or a correction to our systems and institutions and how they shape public order and public justice, but *both*.

According to Abraham Kuyper, the challenges of our time require, "not only the *physician*, but most certainly the *architect* as well." Restoring and repairing a sense of common life together is about hearts but also about systems. It is about ends but also about means. It is about theological categories, certainly, but also lived models. And this is what neo-Calvinism, particularly its two champions Herman Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper, can offer from their own tumultuous, changing, and fractured time, rife with problems not unlike our own polarization and individualism. Placed alongside our contemporary challenges, their insights sound remarkably fresh—perhaps even ideally suited for our time.

Herein lies some 19th-century wisdom for 21st-century problems, from the neo-Calvinist project of restoration, not repristination, of reformation, not revolution.

Bavinck and Kuyper provide theological categories that offer both a framework and fodder for a renewed common life together. In these, as Calvinist theologians, they drew deeply and distinctly from their own theological tradition, the Reformed tradition. But importantly, these categories are applicable far beyond Calvinist theology, as both Kuyper and Bavinck stress the catholicity of the church.

Kuyper, known for bold, even brash statements about a whole host of matters, was characteristically fulsome in his praise of Calvinism's truth—perhaps in a way that could prove damaging for ecumenical efforts. In his *Lectures on Calvinism*, he proclaimed that "in Calvinism my heart has found rest." Lest we paint a picture of these neo-Calvinists as so devoted to Calvinism that they saw no other way of Christian faithfulness, Bavinck concluded his reflections on his voyage to North America this way: "Calvinism, after all, is not the only truth!" This was not, in its fuller context, a wholly relative statement supporting any number of truths; rather, it was a declaration that the triune Christian God works and moves through many

theological traditions. Calvinism, in other words, is not the only way to be Christian.

Nonetheless, both Kuyper and Bavinck were devoted Calvinists and drew critical insights for life in common out of their theological tradition. What did this mean for them? Quite simply, a stress on God's sovereignty over all of creation. As Kuyper articulated, Calvinism's "dominating principle" is "*the Sovereignty of the Triune God over the whole Cosmos*, in all its spheres and kingdoms, visible and invisible." From this assurance comes three major theological categories that undergird their project of restoration and reformation: sphere sovereignty, common grace, and the *imago Dei*.

SPHERE SOVEREIGNTY

In Kuyper's inaugural lecture upon the founding of the Free University in the Netherlands, he famously declared that Christ's rule and reign extends to *all* the square inches of creation. In his *Lectures on Calvinism*, he continues this line of thinking: Every aspect of creation is directed and designed by God and, importantly, ought to submit to God. Creation is not uniform, but contains an "infinite diversity, an inexhaustible profusion of variations." In society, this multiformity, to use a favorite word of Kuyper's, can be seen in the variety of spheres God has ordered in creation.

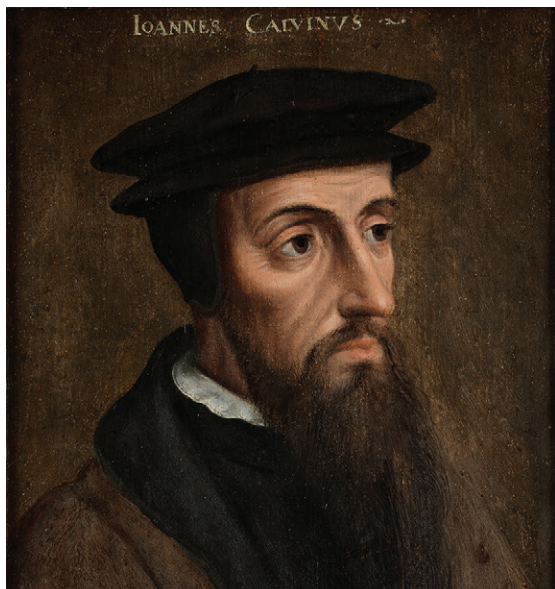
Kuyper uses the language of "sphere" as a designation for the various institutions of society: education, church, state, family, business, art, and more. In his short biography of Kuyper, Richard Mouw describes this central concept for Kuyper's thought in this way: a sphere is "an arena where interactions take place, and where some sort of authority is exercised." While Kuyper never gives us an exact list of the designated spheres in creation, he gives us a clear sense that spheres are distinct areas of cultural and social interaction. These societal spheres may be distinct but they are not disconnected. Because all of creation is the work of one sovereign God, "the cogwheels of all these spheres engage each other, and precisely through that interaction emerges the rich, multifaceted multiformity of human life." In their distinctions, however, each sphere has its own identity, authority, and norms. The church is not the state, nor does it govern itself in the same way. The family is not a business, nor are relationships structured identically in both institutions. The designs and norms of each sphere are not arbitrary, nor human-made. God

himself has designed them and written them into his creation.

The relationship between the authority and norms of each sphere and the ultimate authority, rule, and reign of God, Kuyper argues, can be understood through the concept of "sphere sovereignty." God's authority cannot be limited to the church, nor can it be merely mediated through the church. Rather, God's ultimate authority over all of creation is directly delegated to humanity, in various spheres.

Such a claim has radical implications: No human or institution can have ultimate authority over all others; the "perfect Sovereignty of the *sinless* Messiah at the same time directly denies and challenges all absolute Sovereignty among *sinful* men on earth, and does so by dividing life into *separate spheres*, each with its own sovereignty" (emphasis in the original). God is directly sovereign over art, science, business, church, family, and every sphere in his creation. Thus, each sphere—in its patterns, rules, norms—must ultimately submit to God's authority *and* respect its own bounds and

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”



John Calvin (1509–1564)

limitations. A sphere, like the state, argues Kuyper, may “never become an octopus....It must occupy its own place, on its own root, among the other trees of the forest.” It is *God*, after all, who is sovereign, not humans. Such a claim places limitations on the coercive powers of the state, even to forcefully *enact* those norms which are God’s. As we await that time when all things will fully and rightly submit to the norms God has set out for them, our posture ought to be one of *principled* pluralism in the public square.

Even as we await God’s coming kingdom, though, God upholds these norms for his world—including every sphere, which continue to be directly accountable to God to fulfill his norms and purposes. In these we can find a sense of both freedom and boundaries in our shared—and interconnected—societal life. Though made hazy by human sin, these norms are still discoverable on account of Kuyper and Bavinck’s next theological category: common grace.

COMMON GRACE

Like all Christians, Bavinck and Kuyper hold both to the reality that God created the world good and that, through Adam and Eve’s act of disobedience, our world is now fallen into sin. Bavinck in his *Reformed Dogmatics* writes that in this act of disobedience, “history itself changes...it becomes a history of sin, misery, and death.”

And yet there still are glimmers of good in this world: neighborly kindness, fidelity in marriage, beautiful artwork, the laughter of a child, lyrical poetry, captivating cantatas, and more. Such a list of the good things in this world could go on and on. The reality of life in this world, of course, is that such a list could be paired with the horrible atrocities we witness this side of the fall.

Kuyper and Bavinck make the case that it is a unique grace of God, a *common* grace, that allows for these good things to persist in the face of the fall’s devastation. Following the fall, God, they argue, continues to providentially uphold and sustain his creation with, as Bavinck puts it, an “economy of divine forbearance and long-suffering.” This work of God, in spite of human sin, can only be called a grace, for it is an undeserved gift to all humanity. Humanity “exists and lives only by the grace of God...[who] firmly grounds the being and life of creation in a covenant with all of nature and with every living being.”

Our deeply polarized, fractured public square emphasizes difference: in identity, in presuppositions, in context, and more. Without negating important differences, Kuyper and Bavinck’s insistence on a shared gift of God for *all* humanity, a common grace, ought to lead us to an expectation that—despite differences—we can also find common ground, shared knowledge, and insights to be gained from the “other.” Such commonality is not rooted fundamentality in humanity’s promise and brilliance, but in God’s ongoing goodness toward all his creatures.

IMAGO DEI

In his common grace, God upholds the creational structures of his world, even as sin rages. Gordon Spykman, a later neo-Calvinist thinker, argues that “the creation order establishes an ontic commonality and solidarity among all peoples.” Even in the midst of deep, postlapsarian differences, this solidarity persists. Not only are we all recipients of God’s unmerited gifts (rain and sun, restraint of sin, civic justice), which certainly gives us the ability to come together, but we also share an “ontic commonality,” a shared reality of our very essence, including being made in the image of God.

Much ink has been spilled by theologians to determine what exactly it means that we are image bearers of the triune God. For some, this is primarily located in the soul. For others, the intellect. For others, our rationality. For others, our call to dominion. Bavinck

argues, however, that a person “does not *bear* or *have* the image of God, but he or she *is* the image of God” (emphasis in the original). Rejecting any dualism that may pit body and soul against each other, or amplify only one aspect of our humanness, Bavinck again insists that “nothing in a human being is excluded from the image of God.” The image of God includes our souls, our faculties (our “emotions and passions...desire and will...thinking and knowing”), our virtues, and our bodies.

But even here, with a holistic articulation of the individual human person as the image of God, Bavinck has not completed what he understands to be the meaning of our imaging God. We do not simply image God as individuals. Rather, “only the whole of humanity is the fully developed image of God, his children, his offspring. The image of God is much too rich for it to be fully realized in a single human being, however richly gifted that human being may be. It can only be somewhat unfolded in its depth and riches in a humanity counting billions of members.” United together in our shared reality of image bearers, we cannot fully understand what it is to be human, or made in the image of God, without each other. “Every human being is himself or herself an image of God,” he again insists, “yet that image is only fully unfolded in humanity as a whole!”

Bavinck’s picture of humanity as the image of God certainly highlights that we have some sense of deep commonality with our neighbor, with the other. But his vision of the *imago Dei* pushes us beyond simply commonality *toward* the other. We cannot, he maintains, think of ourselves as merely individuals but instead as part of an organic whole, united in our diversity. We have a better picture of ourselves, and God, together in our diversity. No doubt, not all the diversity displayed in humanity postlapsarian is *good* diversity, but Bavinck’s understanding of the *imago Dei* stresses the reality that we were not created homogeneously, nor does our shared status as *imago Dei* wipe out distinctions.

In the difference that often divides, Bavinck’s vision of the unfolding, collective, eschatological nature of the image of God gives us fodder to discern the beauty of diversity and what we might learn from those unlike ourselves.

In theory, sphere sovereignty, common grace, and the *imago Dei* provide helpful fodder for overcoming the tribal polarizations that seem to afflict our common life. They do not erase differences but instead provide credible and crucial foundations in which differences can be acknowledged and adjudicated. They help us see each other

Expulsion from the Garden of Eden by Thomas Cole





Leiden University Library in 1610, drawing by Johannes Woudanus, engraving by Willem Swanenburgh

as image bearers, keep watch for points of common interest and concern, and guard our lives against the error of totalizing or deifying any part of life.

Kuyper and Bavinck did this not only as theologians and professors but also as political and social actors. Both men spent their careers both articulating these deep theological truths and applying them in the public square as journalists, pastors, and politicians—Kuyper as the eventual prime minister of the Netherlands, Bavinck as a member of the First Chamber (Senate).

REFORMATION, NOT REVOLUTION

Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck were members of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, a party founded by Kuyper himself in 1879 and one that Bavinck reluctantly became president of when Kuyper assumed his duties as prime minister.

This party, as its name clearly suggests, takes on a central posture of neo-Calvinism: reformation, not revolution. As president of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, in 1905, Bavinck gave a speech that included this striking summary of what reformation, not revolution, looks like in practice. Those who follow the path of reformation, he argues,

go in the new situations in state and society, of philosophy and science, of literature and art, of profession and business; they investigate everything and preserve the good. They are no praise-singers of the past times and do not wail idly about the miseries of the present, but they intervene and reform according to the ideal they face. Even though they know that on earth things will never be set right before the second coming of Christ, and though this protects them from superficial optimism, they still work and do not get tired and never

despair. No repristination, no maintaining of the status quo, but reformation is their motto.

Here, Bavinck draws two critical distinctions: An anti-revolutionary posture in society is neither revolutionary, a radical response to the crises of the day that seeks an entirely fresh start, nor repristination, a response that merely seeks to re-create what has been lost or maintain status quo.

Instead, Bavinck and Kuyper's *anti-revolutionary* posture was driven by the conviction that God was and is at work in history. Such a posture does not negate the reality that their—and our—context was desperately in need of both a physician and an architect, but, as Bavinck wrote in *The Christian Family*, it does “distinguish between reality that is safe [healthy] and that which is sick.” To affirm a revolutionary posture is to affirm that *all* of society is sick, rather than discerning *where* society is ill; it makes “no distinction between nature and sin and eradicates the good with the bad” (“Christian Principles and Social Relationships”). Because God is at work in his creation, upholding it and continuing to bestow good gifts upon it, we can trust that there is good in society and seek it out, all the while rooting out the bad.

FORMATIVE FRIENDSHIP

Bavinck and Kuyper, in their multifaceted careers in journalism, pastoral work, education, politics, and more; in their particular moment in European history; and out of their theological convictions that drove them *into* the world to see what God is doing in “every square inch” of creation, were often confronted with deep difference. Rather than simply avoid or absorb different worldviews, they engaged in formative friendships, finding common ground and opportunities to learn from these differences. This is an area where Bavinck shines as an exemplar, so we will briefly examine one relationship: a friendship with Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje.

Snouck Hurgronje and Bavinck met while students at the University of Leiden. James Eglinton, Bavinck's English biographer, describes Snouck as “a theologically liberal student who would become his generation's most important Dutch scholar of Islam.” The differences between Bavinck and Snouck were vast: Bavinck was an orthodox, conservative Calvinist, and Snouck, when they met, belonged to the mainline Dutch church and later converted

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to Islam. Despite these differences, theirs was a deep, true, lifelong friendship. We can see intimate glimpses into their friendship through letters that have been preserved, from their youth to their death. Their conversation spans from the day-to-day realities of their lives, to their joys and struggles, to intense intellectual debate. They regularly read and critiqued each other's work.

As a young man, Bavinck wrote this to Snouck when he completed his Ph.D.:

And so, we have both reached the end of our academic studies. I can only regret that we have gone so far, immensely far, from each other in principle and view of life. And yet my sincere friendship and warm interest will remain with you despite such great difference in insight and conviction. I hope that this difference will become smaller, but I do not yet see this.

So often we shy away from those who differ, resulting in social and intellectual cul-de-sacs. But in this letter, Bavinck demonstrates the opposite impulse: *toward* one who disagrees, without downplaying the gravity of the disagreement.

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Bavinck not only understood a deep personal relationship to be possible in the face of significant worldview differences; he also understood intellectual formation and learning to be both possible and important in the face of deep difference. Later, in another letter to Snouck, he wrote:

We can still learn a great deal from each other and be useful to each other. And precisely because I live among kindred spirits, the correction of opponents who are still friends is all the more indispensable to me.

Rather than simply relishing the affirmation of “kindred spirits,” Bavinck explicitly sought out dissenting voices to help sharpen thought and push him in his convictions.

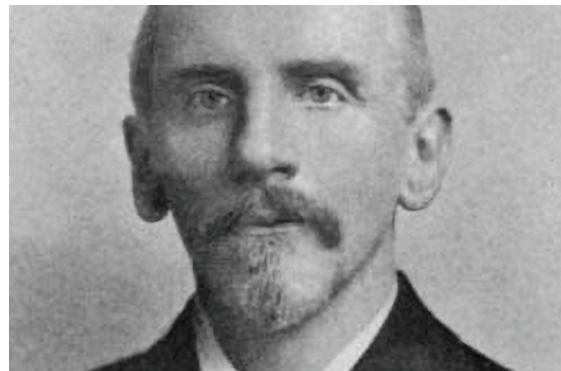
Constructive, formative disagreement and debate take work and deep relational investment. Bavinck

was acutely aware of this, as seen in his relationship with Snouck. They did not simply focus on their areas of disagreement, nor did they shy away from them. Bavinck’s posture in friendship with Snouck can be seen time and time again throughout his life. As Eglinton explains, Bavinck “prized human contact with conversation partners—even those driven by radically different convictions—and took pains to understand them on their own strongest terms.” He displayed generosity toward his opponents’ positions even while remaining in disagreement. Bavinck’s work, including his great *Reformed Dogmatics*, includes considerable reference to and engagement with those with whom he deeply disagrees, often finding ways to highlight areas where their insights are helpful and constructive to his own, very different theological project.

THE BAD WITH THE GOOD

Kuyper and Bavinck have much to contribute to our common life, but none of this is to suggest that there are not troubling aspects of the neo-Calvinist legacy as well that should not be brought into our contemporary challenges. As Vincent Bacote argues in *The Spirit in Public Theology*, we must “decide what to bring from Kuyper’s era and what to leave in the past.” After all, in Kuyper’s own words, to be within a living tradition

is not to copy the past, as if Calvinism were a petrification, but to go back to the living root of the Calvinist plant, to clean and to water it, and so to cause it to bud and to blossom once more, now fully in accordance with our actual life in these modern times, and with the demands of the times to come.



Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936)



Abraham Kuyper, 1912

Not only ought we to consider the new ways we can apply insights in a new time but also the ways we can continue to renew, refine, and even reject some insights so they are more in line with scriptural truth.

In this case, there is one aspect of the neo-Calvinist, Kuyperian legacy that must be highlighted: racism and apartheid. For all the positives we can take away from Abraham Kuyper, we also must grapple with the reality that—despite his affirmations of the beauty of diversity in creation—his account of racial diversity within humanity was deeply problematic and damaging. In well-known speeches and writing, including his *Lectures on Calvinism*, Kuyper perpetuated a racist account of the superiority of European over African ancestry.

Alongside his understanding of the racial superiority of European over African ancestry, Kuyper's notion of pillarization, one that championed clear separation between various spheres of society, was used by some to promote not only a separation of societal spheres but also a separation, or apartheid, of races. Appealing to the story of Babel, during the apartheid era a report from the white Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa argued that distinctions between people are introduced by God, and thus “the church should avoid the modern tendency to erase all distinctions among peoples.” While sometimes too straight a line is drawn from Kuyper to the clearest example of this idea, apartheid South Africa, it is undeniable that Kuyper's thought was influential in its development.

Without downplaying where Kuyper went badly wrong, we can also see where Kuyper's legacy has had a positive effect. Alongside deeply troubling aspects, his message of a gospel that lays claim to “every square inch” has certainly also propelled Christians toward robust cultural engagement in search of the common good.

In the case of this profoundly troublesome aspect of Kuyper's legacy, Bavinck provides an important corrective. As George Harinck describes, Bavinck “stressed the unity of mankind as an explicit Christian idea” and passed this insistence on to his students, some of whom would go on to be leaders in the anti-apartheid movement.

Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, together two stalwarts of neo-Calvinism, sound to us contemporary in part, I think, because our own social and political problems are not so dramatically different: dehumanizing political rhetoric, tribalistic fragmentation, institutional transition and degradation, massive social upheaval, and technological transformation; these describe Kuyper and Bavinck's days as easily as our own.

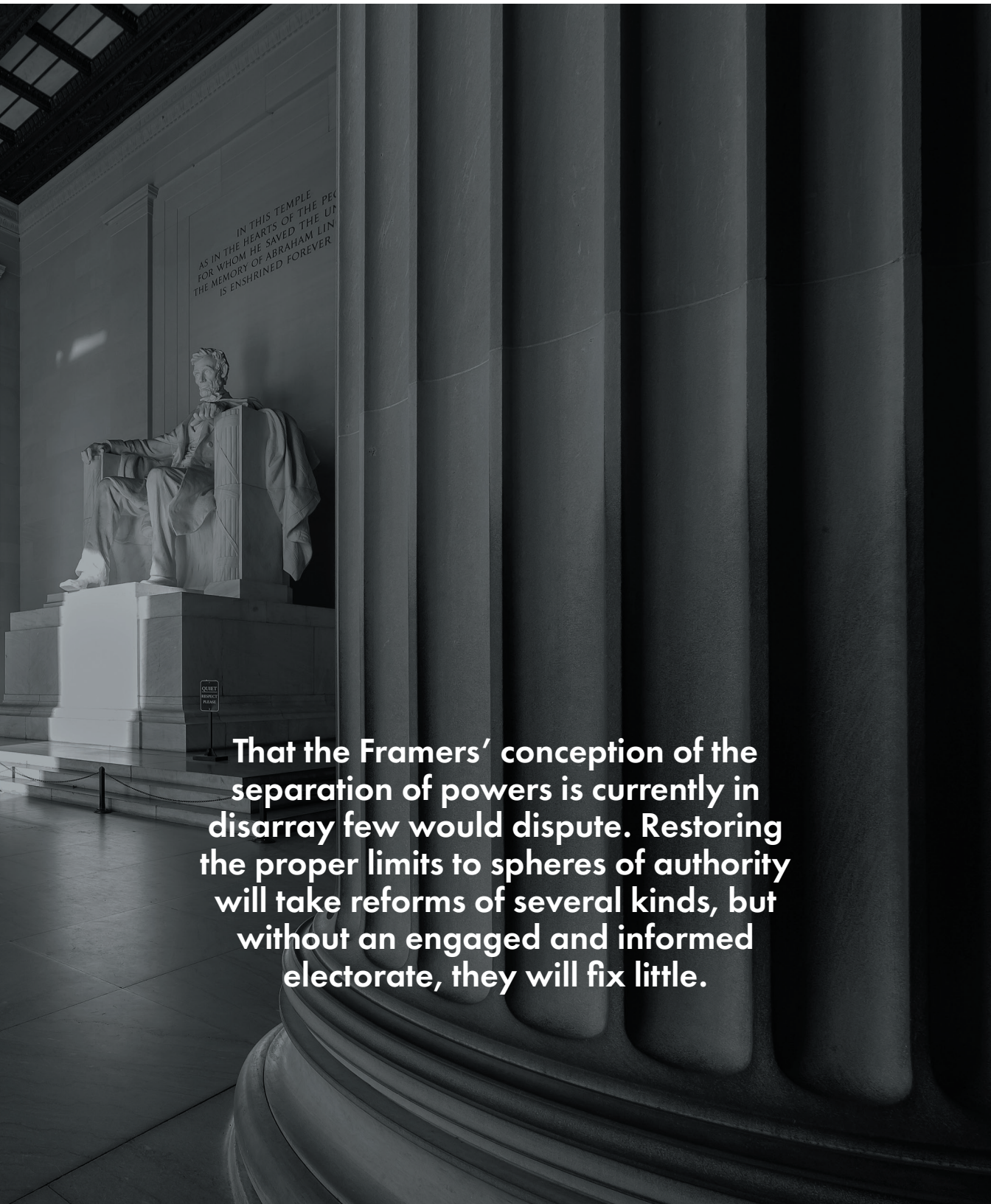
Our practice and application will doubtless prove very different, but the fundamental posture is not so different: a curiosity underwritten by a commonness in grace, a boldness in friendship and relationships catalyzed by co-image bearers, and an institutional and cultural fidelity fueled by the creative diversity of human work and life in the world. Their goal was not to banish disagreement, even fundamental and difficult disagreements, and ours would be a fool's errand if so, but to gift to Christians a restatement of Calvinistic principles—of Gospel *good news*—for reformation and restoration, for a new age. Our 21st-century task is not all that different. **RL**

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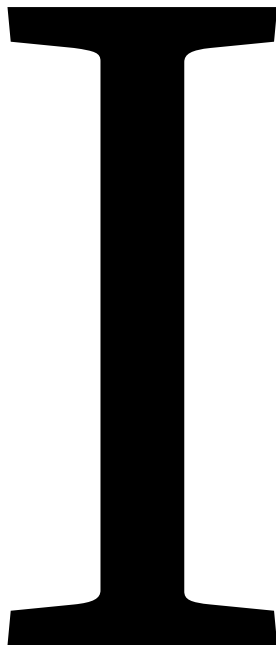
CIVIC EDUCATION AND AMERICAN RENEWAL

by GREG WEINER





That the Framers' conception of the separation of powers is currently in disarray few would dispute. Restoring the proper limits to spheres of authority will take reforms of several kinds, but without an engaged and informed electorate, they will fix little.



IT IS NOT AN INTRINSIC INDICTMENT of today's national government to say that the Framers of the U.S. Constitution would not recognize it. They were, after all, revolutionaries who threw off the mother empire on the battlefield and threw off the Articles of Confederation behind closed doors. They neither asked nor sought either unthinking or eternal submission. The question is whether their wisdom and the endurance of their handiwork merit deferential respect.

Lincoln thought they did. He explained at Cooper Union that we are not "bound to follow implicitly in whatever our fathers did." That "would be to discard

all the lights of current experience—to reject all progress—all improvement." However:

What I do say is, that if we would supplant the opinions and policy of our fathers in any case, we should do so upon evidence so conclusive, and argument so clear, that even their great authority, fairly considered and weighed, cannot stand; and most surely not in a case whereof we ourselves declare they understood the question better than we.

Lincoln's standard for constitutional change, in other words, is not blind deference but rather thoughtful deference. On constitutional issues, the views of "our fathers" carry a presumption in their favor. That presumption can be overcome only by the application of experience with the goal of improvement.

That brings us to the nature of American constitutional government today. The changes are myriad. The party system has trumped the separation of powers. The New Deal regime has vastly expanded national power. The administrative state has eroded republicanism. Lincoln's question about these and other changes is whether they reflect deference to the Framers and draw on their wisdom. In some cases, they do. In many, we have spurned not only the Framers' example but Lincoln's, too.

The Constitution prescribes a system for amendment that requires support for regime-level change to be persistent and nationally dispersed. *Federalist* 43 explained: "The mode [of constitutional amendment] preferred by the convention seems to be stamped with every mark of propriety. It guards equally against that extreme facility, which would render the Constitution too mutable; and that extreme difficulty, which might perpetuate its discovered faults."

The fact that this system has been employed only 27 times—10 of them in the immediate aftermath of ratification—might itself be the greatest shock to the Framers if they saw the Constitution today. In that sense, the "veneration" for which *Federalist* 49 calls may have set in too deeply: The sense is that an issue must rise to the level of extraordinary importance, even crisis, before the Constitution can be touched.

Yet it has been touched. A simple glance at the regime verifies that. Not only that, it has been changed in precisely the ways the Framers would not have predicted. In *Federalist* 85, for example,

Alexander Hamilton predicted that amendments would “be applicable to the organization of the government, not to the mass of its powers.” The mass of national power may be the most explicit and far-reaching change in the regime.

And yet: No less an authority than James Madison suggested changes could occur outside the process of amendment. In a veto message in January 1815, President Madison dropped his constitutional objections to the National Bank he had bitterly opposed in the 1790s. He explained that he was

waiving the question of the constitutional authority of the Legislature to establish an incorporated bank as being precluded in my judgment by repeated recognitions under varied circumstances of the validity of such an institution in acts of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the Government, accompanied by indications, in different modes, of a concurrence of the general will of the nation.

Put otherwise, Madison recognizes the possibility of constitutional change not just by formal amendment but also by persistent consensus. This fact supplies the gravest challenge to those disposed to heed *Federalist* 49’s call for constitutional veneration. The most significant changes in the regime—the erosion of separation of powers, the rise of administration, the scope of national powers—arguably can claim even more persistent and generational consensus than the National Bank could in 1815.

It is only when we seek a substantive, not merely procedural, standard for constitutional change that we see the problem in its full dimensions. When Hamilton predicted that amendments would fine-tune procedures but not fundamentally expand the scope of the regime, what he meant was that the Constitution’s basic principles should animate reform. Edmund Burke, the great theorist of conserving reform, made a comparable point in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*:

I would not exclude [constitutional] alteration neither; but even when I changed, it should be to preserve. I should be led to my remedy by a great grievance. In what I did, I should follow the example of our ancestors. I would make the reparation as nearly as possible in the style of the building.

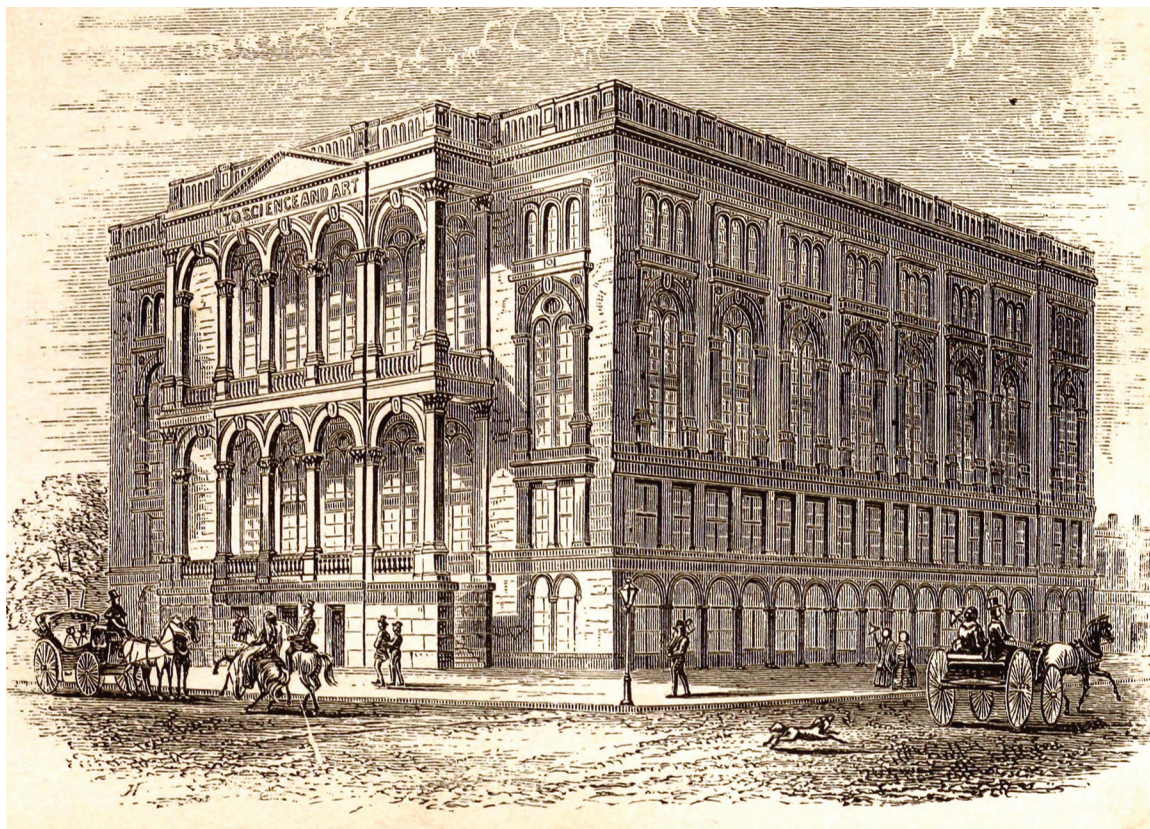
Do the constitutional changes wrought since the Founding reflect great need while preserving the

principles of the regime? In most cases they do not. A review of several of those changes, gauged against the Hamiltonian and Burkean standard of reform, shows why—and points to promising priorities for constitutional renewal.

The erosion of the separation of powers is perhaps the most fundamental constitutional change since the Founding. The irony is that Madison helped induce it by co-founding the party system with Thomas Jefferson. The party system has overridden institutional loyalty—the motive force that Madison as Publius said would maintain separation of powers—with institutional ones.

This is seen most acutely in the collapse of congressional authority *at the hands of Congress*. The delegation of vast swaths of authority to the executive branch in the name of sweeping and poorly

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Cooper Union in 1876, from Miller's *Strangers' Guide for the City of New York*

articulated goals is the clearest illustration. Members of Congress show little appetite for defending their own authority, either giving it away or—on those rare occasions when dander rises—asking the courts to fight the battle against the executive for them.

A renewal of the separation of powers therefore demands conserving reforms whose goal is to induce institutional assertion. Term limits might be a reform in the Hamiltonian mode of changes in structure rather than scope. Congressional careerism did not always encourage legislators to surrender their own authority. The great careerists, like Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, defended legislative power.

No more: One senses that the reason to maintain an infinite career now is personal, not political, and the cost of maintaining one's job has been to empty it of real authority. As Yuval Levin has noted, members of Congress today are performers, not legislators.

The case for term limits is that they might—*might*—change the motive for serving. By removing the possibility of an infinite career, they hold the promise of focusing a legislator's attention on the job

at hand. A legislator whose motive is accomplishing or defending something in a discrete period of time might be inclined to defend his or her authority to do so.

Of course, there is no silver constitutional bullet. The ultimate guarantor of congressional authority is a public willing to vote for members who will uphold it—a public that is familiar with the fundamental importance of the separation of powers and that will elect representatives accordingly.

There is consequently a related problem: the national obsession with the presidency and the corresponding deference to administrative expertise.

The presidency has become the sun around which all political actors orbit. Its power is swollen beyond the Framers' recognition. Abetted by Congress, the war powers that necessarily expanded the presidency in the 20th century have crept into the domestic realm.

The expansion of presidential power has also aggravated the obsession with presidential personalities.

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Pick one’s partisan poison: Barack Obama and Donald Trump both aroused intensely personal loyalties and antipathies. Perhaps even more disturbing, these have seeped into lower levels of politics, so much so that candidates for local office routinely declare their loyalty or opposition to presidents who have, or should have, no bearing on the questions in dispute.

The problem is that the expansion of the presidency means the corrosion of self-government. That observation stands against the Jacksonian view that the president is the only national officer who is nationally chosen. The very fact of national election means the presidency is a binary institution: Those who support the president are in; those who oppose the president are out. Congress is far better equipped to register the nuances in public opinion that just might lead to more fruitful political conversation.

Here again, citizens must care for constitutional integrity over showmanship or even policy. That something should be done does not mean the president should do it. Until voters not only grasp this distinction but also cast ballots based on it, presidential bloat will continue.

The irony is that despite this fixation on the person of the president, the real source of executive

power is the administrative state. Congress delegates authority to the executive, typically with only the most basic principles attached. It rarely recognizes that these principles almost always conflict with other principles, often articulated in other laws. All this requires resolution and implementation, which we have chosen to address by seeking expertise. American politics has therefore witnessed the rise of administration over politics.

Overcoming this requires recalibrating our view of expertise. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with deferring to experts in the same way Lincoln deferred to the Framers: respectfully but not blindly. But there are few political questions that are simple matters of expertise, if only because experts within a discipline disagree with each other and because most political issues require a prudential balancing of different issues.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point: A politician who wishes to “follow the science,” as the refrain goes, must first ask whether scientific experts agree with each other. They rarely do. But more important, he or she must weigh public health expertise against medical expertise. Physical health must be balanced against mental health. All these questions must be balanced with expertise from different specialties, whether economics or sociology.

A calibrated deference to expertise would recognize the inescapable fact that politics, *bien entendu*, must govern expertise. The prudent politician will genuinely value expertise but recognize that most political questions are too complex to be distilled to a single form of it. The tyranny of expertise and the populist dismissal of all expertise are both real phenomena. Prudence must hold the balance between them.

The simplistic demand of deference to experts also obliterates another constitutional value we should revive: variety.

All the foregoing dynamics—reflexive partisanship, obsession with the presidency, deference to expertise—work against the principle of federalism. The case for renewing federalism is the value of variety and subsidiarity combined with the danger of centralized power.

James Madison, an advocate of both national authority within its proper sphere and local authority within its, offered two arguments for federalism in *The Federalist*. The Madison of *Federalist* 39 saw federalism as a normative principle of politics that

was analogous to the principle of subsidiarity. On this view, animated by the principle of self-government, local issues should in principle be decided by local majorities.

In *Federalist* 44 and 46, however, Madison offered a different view, what we might call “administrative” federalism. According to this view, the people were entitled to allocate authority at whatever level of government they found to be most competent. If, to take a modern example, the national government was better at hauling away the trash, there was no principled reason the people should be prevented from assigning it to do so.

Administrative federalism has generally triumphed over normative federalism. A healthier balance between the two would help renew the principles of the regime, especially republicanism. As Tocqueville noted, citizen participation in local government is more meaningful than a dissipated affiliation with national government, so federalism serves the purpose of encouraging the common good and discouraging unhealthy individualism. It also promotes variety—Brandeis’ “laboratories of democracy.” Neither political party has a monopoly on virtue here. Republicans have sought to impose their views on issues ranging from education to abortion at the national level, while Democrats have done the same. The cost is extracted in public alienation from politics.

The growing tendency to outsource political or constitutional disputes to the judiciary also threatens self-government. This has tended, but only tended, to be a progressive phenomenon inextricable from the progressive aspiration to “scientific legislation.”

Widespread deference to courts undermines self-government in the same way that inactivity atrophies muscles. A rights-obsessed culture on both ends of the political spectrum surrenders the citizen’s responsibility to undertake the political work of balancing rights, nearly all of which clash with other priorities.

That is not to say judges have no role to play in checking politics. They do. But their disposition should be deferential to public opinion as it is constitutionally registered: through elections and subsequent representation. The late-19th-century legal scholar James Bradley Thayer is held in low repute in many legal circles today. But there is more wisdom in his rule of the “clear mistake” (i.e., courts should not overturn legislation unless “those who have the right

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to make laws have not merely made a mistake, but have made a very clear one”) than is generally recognized.

In part, that requires the elected branches to be willing to use their ample powers to check the courts. It also requires that judges, like other constitutional officers, have a proper view of their own power rather than pursuing it to the hilt until they meet a countervailing force. And ultimately, it requires a disposition among the people to converse rather than to sue.

F*ederalist* 10’s ethic of representation, according to which the legislator’s vocation is to “refine and enlarge the public views,” is being squeezed by the pressure of immediacy. The pace of politics and the demand for instant political gratification make representation difficult. Put otherwise, representatives no longer have the constitutional space in which to deliberate and allow public passions to dissipate with time.

It bears emphasis that this is not a purely elite view of representation. Unlike Burke's representative in his "Speech to the Electors of Bristol," who is accountable to his or her own conscience, Madison's representative is bound to the raw material of public opinion. But no one would run for Congress today on a promise to refine and enlarge his or her constituents' views. Candidates are much likelier to pledge obedience to them.

This is not, at core, a problem of craven representatives. It is a failure of humility on the part of the people. It is also a reflection of an unhealthy obsession with politics—embodied by partisan, 24-hour news—that collapses the proper distance between representative and citizen.

Thus the foundation on which constitutional renewal ultimately rests: all of us.

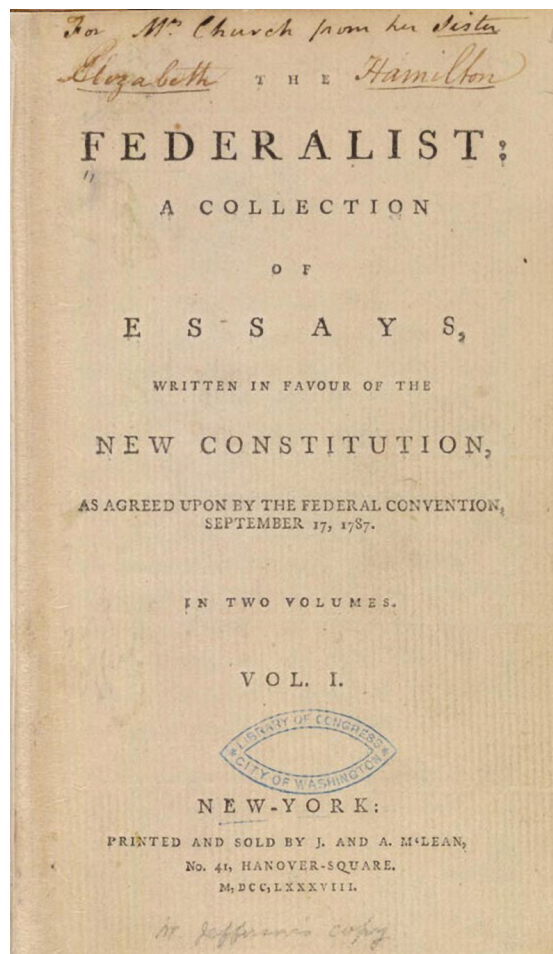
At the Virginia Ratifying Convention, Patrick Henry, opposing the Constitution, accused Madison of failing to account for virtue in the proposed regime. Madison replied: "Is there no virtue among us? If there be not, we are in a wretched situation. No theoretical checks—no form of government can render us secure. To suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea."

He had expressed a similar sentiment in *Federalist* 55:

As there is a degree of depravity in mankind, which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature, which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form.

Yet these more salutary qualities require cultivation, and the basic moral disposition they entail must be wedded to basic civic knowledge. Civic education in America lies in a sorry state, either neglected—which is more common than is supposed—or distorted.

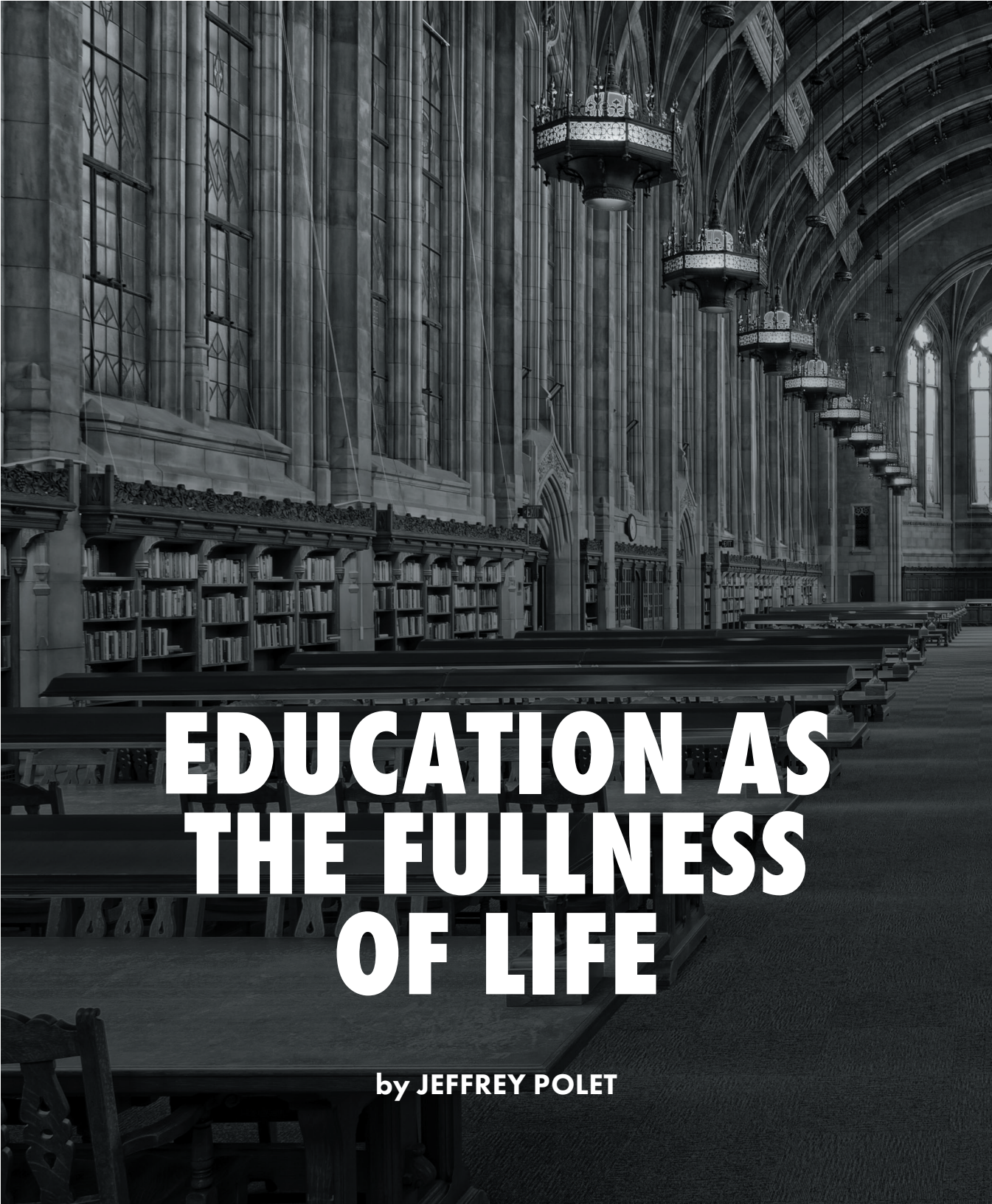
Civic education must partake of the mechanics of the regime, but also the principles that undergird them: Judge Learned Hand's modest spirit of liberty, "which is not too sure that it is right"; an ethic that how things happen is as important as what occurs; and patience for the tempo of constitutional time. These are best imparted not by finger-wagging but rather by cultivating what Burke called "the moral imagination": the ability to derive moral lessons without being explicitly lectured on morality.



The Federalist: A Collection of Essays, Written in Favour of the New Constitution, as Agreed upon by the Federal Convention, September 17, 1787

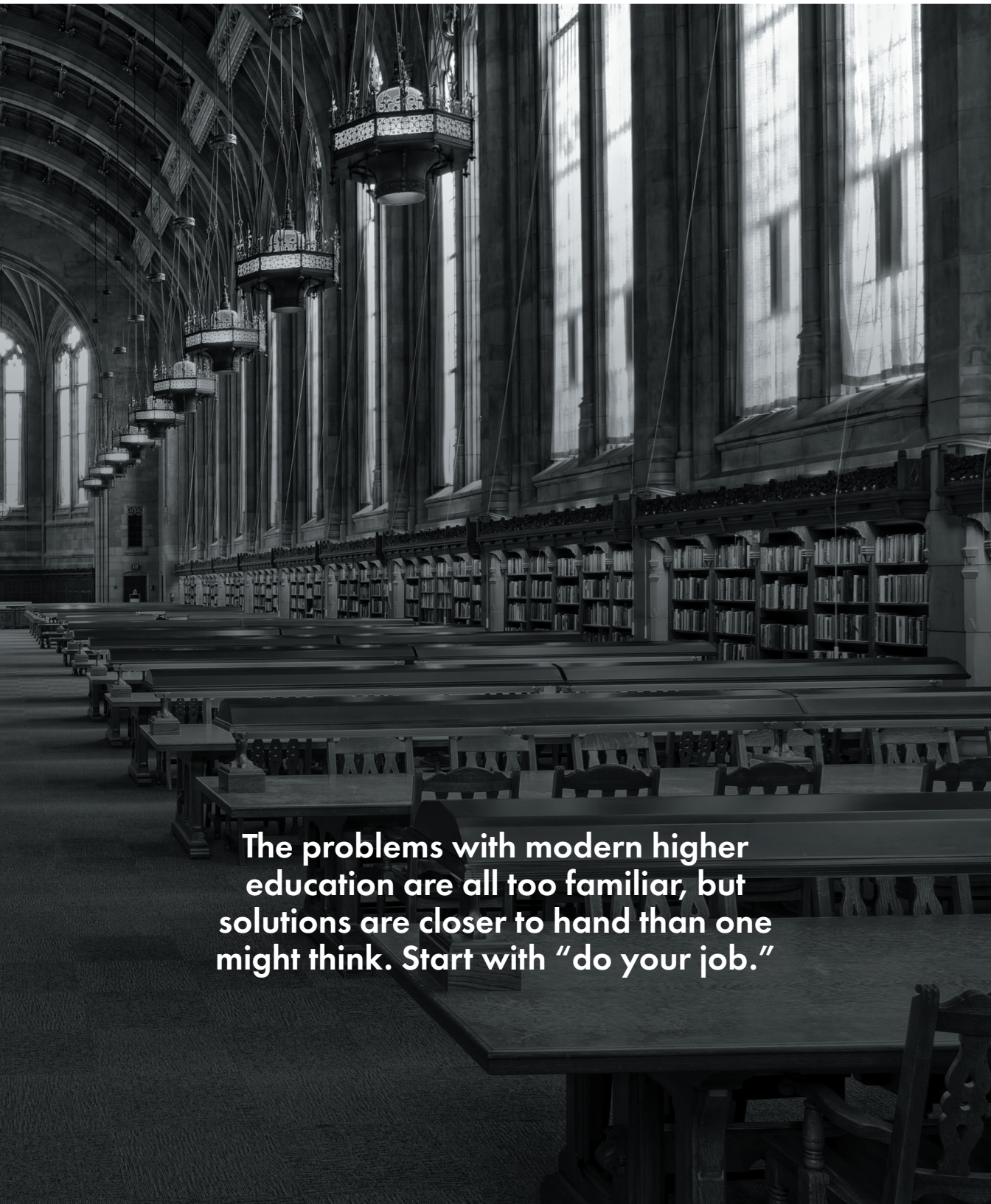
Civic education may seem an ethereal, even naive, solution. But it is worth noting that a corrupted version of civic education has succeeded in shaping citizens' understanding of their government, especially among youth. The lesson of that is not simply to beware bad civic education. It is that civic education works. Properly conceived and skillfully executed, it may be the best hope we have for constitutional renewal. **RL**

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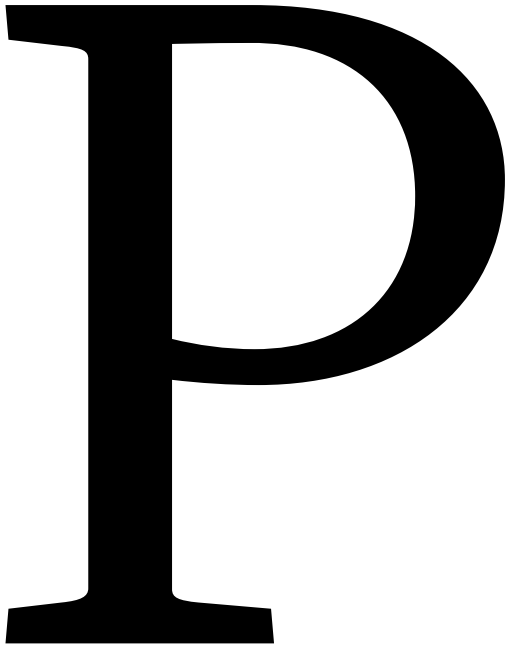


EDUCATION AS THE FULLNESS OF LIFE

by JEFFREY POLET



The problems with modern higher education are all too familiar, but solutions are closer to hand than one might think. Start with “do your job.”



PLATO, IN THE REPUBLIC, complains that in democratic times a teacher “fears and fawns upon the pupils, and the pupils pay no heed to the teacher... or to their overseers either.” The youth ignore their elders, while those supposedly wiser and more experienced “are full of pleasantry and graciousness, imitating the young for fear they may be thought disagreeable and authoritative.” Augustine in his *Confessions* bemoans the intransigence of his students as well as their unwillingness to pay him. Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure* contrasts the academic seriousness of Jude Fawley with his classmates, whose commitment to their education leaves much to be desired.

Our generation may not have invented academic corruption, but we have gone a ways toward perfecting it. Still, it is worth remembering that every generation has its scoundrels and saints, good and bad students and teachers. In many ways the basics of education haven’t changed that much: There are things worth knowing that require much study; those that engage in that study seek to communicate what they’ve learned; the knowledge gained proves both useful and generative of personal growth. Granted, one can alter how such knowledge gets communicated, and one can diminish the authority of the teacher as well as the natural curiosity of the student (indeed, one might think of our school systems as devices for turning naturally curious five-year-olds into jaded and disengaged 18-year-olds), but you can’t completely efface the desire to know.

One shouldn’t despair too readily over our contemporary state of affairs. I’ve written widely on the derailment of our educational institutions and the winnowing of standards. If that’s all there was to the story, it would be difficult to explain why I’ve stuck with it for 30-plus years. The answer is simple: I’ve loved what I teach and who I teach, and I’ve been able to teach with a great deal of freedom. The average college professor knows he has an employer who exercises some authority over him and presents him with hoops he must jump through, but he also experiences a great deal of autonomy. I’ve been critical of my employer in print with no serious repercussions, and I’ve never been told not to teach material I’ve judged worthy.

More to the point, I’ve been fortunate to have my classes populated with bright, eager, hardworking young persons. Certainly there have been slackers and ne’er-do-wells, and some hardworking kids who don’t quite have it and other kids who have it but don’t work hard; but every year I’ve been in this profession, I’ve had students who I knew for a fact had both a better mind and a better soul than my own. It’s been a privilege to stand in front of them and sit alongside them and contribute in my own way to their development. A teacher who forgets this ought to do the honorable thing and find a new career.

As I said, we didn’t invent academic malfeasance, but we seem committed to the project. The academic enterprise, however, is resilient, and it’s no mystery why: To quote Aristotle, all men *by nature* seek to know. This desire can never be eradicated, and while we might dim its flame by not fueling it, we can never snuff it out. When things look dark, the love of learning may burn brighter than ever. What it needs is the right environment.



The Saint Augustine Taken to School by Saint Monica, by Niccolò di Pietro 1413–15

We need to recapture the proper idea of a community and to understand America as a community of communities. Therapeutic or familial or ecclesial models do not translate well to academic communities. These must, like all communities, satisfy deep human longings for meaning, for belonging, for status, and for a strong sense of self. Evidence indicates that our colleges and universities are failing on this score, and one of the reasons for that, I suggest, is because they are far too self-conscious about it. Take the desire for meaning as an example. We experience its absence when we are engaged in activities that carry within them no *intrinsic* relationship to the good pursued. One doesn't wrestle on the ground with one's young children asking what the point of it is. The point is fully present within the activity, just as you as a participant are fully present in the activity.

This defense of the liberal arts as historically understood laments how education has become instrumentalized. Learning for the sake of learning is the natural default of human beings. Nietzsche wrote that a man's seriousness consists of having "regained the seriousness he had as a child at play." Even so. Recapturing the curiosity we had as children at play is the path forward. Instead, we encourage students to

see themselves as consumers and education instrumentally. In the process we derail their natural desire to know.

Neither do we provide students with answers to the question of what it means to be a human being that takes seriously the four years of leisure college provides. Newman argued that in a liberal arts education the modes of action have their ends in themselves; they are not primarily directed to extrinsic purposes such as satisfying a requirement or getting a good job. A community requires for its perfection persons dedicated to contemplation, who are literally *use-less* (because human beings, like education, ought not be instrumentalized). Such contemplation would necessarily involve an opening up of the self to the transcendent, to learn to be in a receptive mode.

Joseph Pieper in his *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* argues that the active life dedicated to work is not the opposite of idleness but a species of it. Acedia is a lack of being-at-one with oneself, of not wanting to be fully human. In the modern world we tend to see acedia as a lack of ambition or lack of productivity. Rather, Pieper sees acedia opposed not by "the industrious spirit of the daily effort to make a living" but instead by "the cheerful affirmation by man of his own existence, of the world as a whole, and of God." (One wonders why at least one college hasn't adopted this as its mission statement.) A certain kind of inactivity, leisure, then, is a fulfillment of the command to keep the Sabbath, while "industry" may violate the idea of resting in and with God.

Such rest, connected to our eternal nature, frees us from mere idleness or mere labor, and directs us, Pieper claims, toward worship and festive hope. Knowing born of leisure cannot be directed by anything or serve a purpose other than itself—or else it would be servile rather than liberal. To subordinate liberal education to the needs of the state or the economy is to destroy liberal education, for then it becomes merely a means rather than an end.

Rest in God unifies the self. Without the unifying movement of activity into such rest (and the underlying conception of what it means to be human), we become diffused and dissipated. Not understanding leisure, neither can we understand work. And not understanding work, neither can we understand how to fill students' days, or our own, in any meaningful way. We vitiate the classroom of its noble purposes and we create an indulgent but not a coherent education.

Students spend fewer hours on their studies, and schools compensate for this releasing of time by

building larger recreation centers, greater opportunities for amusement, a budget-crushing student life organization, and, tellingly, a revolving door on their counseling center. The rise in mental health problems among students has been dramatic in the past decades, and the percentage of students who seek counseling services has these offices operating on a nearly 24-hour basis. Current students have about a 50/50 chance of becoming clinically depressed while in college. A Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory questionnaire demonstrated that students were five times more likely to experience anxiety and depression as were students during the Great Depression.

It is now more important than ever that liberal arts colleges rethink what they are and what they are doing and work to create alternative modes of community. Surely this is what Alasdair MacIntyre was getting at when he noted that resistance to the Roman imperium coalesced when individuals “ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with that imperium” and instead began to form new communities where the moral life in its wholeness could be sustained amid the coming barbarism. Perhaps the liberal arts college that serves the American imperium least serves it best.

This relates to Michael Oakeshott’s claim in *The Voice of Liberal Learning* that “the idea ‘School’ is that of detachment from the immediate, local world of the learner, its current concerns and the directions it gives to his attention.” A college or university, he

argues, “is a place apart in which the heir may encounter his moral and intellectual inheritance, not in the terms in which it is being used in the current engagements and occupations of the world outside (where much of it is forgotten, neglected, obscured, vulgarized or abridged, and where it appears only in scraps and as investments in immediate enterprises) but as an estate, entire, unqualified and unencumbered.”

Oakeshott affirms that the university is part of society yet does not contribute “to some other kind of activity in the society” but is concerned only with “being itself and not another thing. Its first business is with the pursuit of learning.” Universities have lost their way when they no longer encourage students to be “in search of their intellectual fortune” but instead to “desire only a qualification for earning a living or a certificate to let them in on the exploitation of the world.”

We’ve witnessed no shortage of educational reform efforts in the past few decades, and for the most part they have failed. The failure can best be explained by the loss of focus; that is, they’ve looked at environmental or other factors while taking their eyes off the student. No educational reform can work if it neglects the reality of young persons as beings with both a capacity and a desire to know.

That’s all rather abstract, however. What concrete effects does such attention yield? How might our educational institutions better develop this capacity and desire to know? I know of no one-sized-fits-all solution, but I do think there are general principles. Some of the controversy over the recently proposed University of Austin at Texas centered on the financial and logistical implausibilities of starting a new college. These critics seemed to have forgotten that all colleges started at some point, most of which because a donor or group of donors could make the large-scale capital investment necessary to create the institution. These institutions were typically created for specific purposes or out of a certain tradition or to serve a particular community. Like any institution, schools have had to deal with the tension of being both inward-looking and outward-looking. Too much inwardness and they can quickly become stale or calcified; too much outwardness and they can get unmoored quickly, losing the “distinctiveness” that makes them genuinely interesting.

This tension manifests itself frequently in the hiring process. Schools that hire only their own

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graduates or graduates from similar schools tend to get stuck in their ways and may miss out on genuine progress. Conversely, schools that eagerly adapt “best practices” and aggressively hire people from outside their tradition soon become indistinguishable from all their competitors. This homogenizing of American education effaces the very thing that makes American education not only interesting but, in many ways still, the envy of the world. After all, we produce most of the world’s Nobel Prize winners and lead the world in patents. Young people come from all over the world to study on our campuses, all too often outperforming their American counterparts.

I’m suggesting that when schools begin to lose their way it’s usually because they’ve become too outward-looking, the proper response to which is to become more inward. When your tradition is slipping away from you is precisely the time to double down on it, and to do so unabashedly. This may mean actively recruiting graduates from your college to return and share with a new generation of students the same fanning of the flame they received when they studied there. It means hiring for mission rather than credential, for good citizen over gifted climber.

In order to maintain their mission and academic integrity, schools may want to revisit the uses and abuses of tenure. Tenure and promotion are both carrot and stick, but once given, the tenured, not the coachman, are now in possession of the horse. As a result schools have very few tools to compel compliance with basic faculty expectations. The fact is, there is a great deal of shirking that takes place and very little accountability. Faculty miss classes with seeming impunity. They often give a student’s paper a cursory reading at best, if they read it at all. Frequently not preparing for class, they’ll go in and talk about whatever tickles their fancy that particular day or, worse still, turn class into an encounter session.

Plato identified not doing your job as a particular mode of injustice in that it upsets the harmonious balancing of parts. College campuses face an epidemic of people not doing their jobs: Faculty don’t teach the subject they are paid to teach and will often use class time to discuss matters outside their field. Student evaluations at the end of the semester not only don’t solve the problem but distract from the mechanism that can—administrators actually going into the classroom and seeing faculty at work, as well as meeting with students to get honest feedback. The administrative bloat on campuses would be much



Plato and Aristotle in *The School of Athens* by Raphael

more tolerable if it resulted in greater accountability for faculty and staff.

At the same time, we must insist on the maintenance of academic standards. Getting something for nothing creates crises of confidence. Students disengage in classrooms when they know there are no repercussions for doing so. Schools should focus on making sure conferring degrees represents serious effort and struggle on behalf of students. This requires not only addressing grade inflation but also restricting admissions. Fewer students will mean fewer colleges, or at least colleges with more modest ambitions. Let’s state the obvious: Not every high school graduate should go to college, and not every college is going to produce global leaders.

The identity crisis on campus mirrors the absence of academic standards in another way: Rather than creating communities of learning, we are busy creating communities based on accidental characteristics. This fragmenting of the academic community has a number of effects. For one thing, it invites students to think of academic learning as subordinate to group identity. The search for truth is substituted with the possession of “my truth.” Secondly, academic success relates to one’s relation to a peer group. Students learn more and can become more resilient

and develop more active minds when they are challenged by their peers in informal conversations. Certainly learning takes place in the classroom, but a good deal of it takes place outside the classroom. Schools such as Hillsdale that make learning “cool” are adept at supporting and cultivating these kinds of interactions. Faculty should be involved in helping to form these communities of learning but also need to be as absent as possible so that students may create their own dynamic. Getting rid of affinity groups may encourage students to reconvene on a different basis, and that will likely be an academic one. When I was in college, our coffee table was an “all-comers” corner. It didn’t matter what race or sex you were; the only thing that mattered was whether you were smart, engaged, informed, and ready to mix it up. It was invigorating and humbling and got us outside ourselves.

Having said that, I would not for a minute discount the itch affinity groups scratch. The original title of Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind was Souls Without Longing*. It’s not inconsequential that the publisher replaced souls with minds. Students had souls back then and they have them now; and while we might be doing a poor job cultivating their minds, we haven’t fully quieted their souls. But restless souls that are not given a positive direction, particularly when we allow feeling and not reason to rule, will soon settle on anything that promises to give them that sense of meaning they so desperately need.

Rather than suppressing the desire, we should understand that student groups respond to a genuine human need and offer a means to satisfy the desire. Here is where the academy’s loss of confidence makes of itself its own gravedigger. The restoration both of disciplinary integrity and high academic standards will give students a sense of accomplishment, dissipate a lot of the ideological battles taking place on campuses, better prepare students for life outside college campuses, and provide a tonic to the poison of boredom that infects undergraduate life.

I’d be remiss here if I didn’t remind the reader that rigor accompanies genuine academic work, and this academic work in turn cannot be thought of simply in instrumental terms. Subordinating academic work to bourgeois notions of career development or advancement or progressive or conservative notions of preparing students to fight the culture wars distracts us from genuinely unifying engagements with transcendentals. The open-ended search for truth contrasts with closed ideological formation; it’s the difference

between education and indoctrination. Among the many objections against indoctrination is that it is predictable, and therefore dull. It’s no wonder that our students are so bored. We seldom place in front of them the prospect for open-ended discovery, the excitement that accompanies it, or the joy involved in rigorous effort.

Neither ought we neglect the place of beauty in their lives. Truth attracts us while error repels us, and this is a fundamentally aesthetic insight. Eros drives us to penetrate ever deeper into the truth. Thus, either misdirecting or suppressing the soul’s longings is an act of de-eroticization. The solution involves reawakening those desires, and art and beauty are the mechanism of such reawakening. Schools must intentionally avoid whatever is coarse or grotesque or otherwise ugly (including much rhetoric) and stimulate the twitch for beauty.

Concretely, this means using books or essays that are well crafted and engagingly written. Where possible, avoid the mind-numbing and soul-crushing prose of textbooks and much of academic writing. With effort and attention, most any class, especially in the humanities and social sciences, can be taught using books that people want to read instead of have to read. Likewise, books should not be assigned on their ideological merits but on their literary ones. All too often we view education as an opportunity for students to form their identities rather than to engage dialectically with something attractive. Perhaps the best metaphor for this is that many young men on our campuses would rather view pornography than date an actual young woman. The former is a perverted and artificial notion of attractiveness, one that is replicable, indistinct, and replaceable. The latter is beauty itself: inexhaustible, irreplaceable, unique, and significant. The former is an escape and the latter an adventure. The former is solipsistic and the latter communal. The former is isolating and the latter integrating. The former brings with it shame and the latter joy.

Beauty has always been the pulley by which humans have lifted themselves out of despair. Our crisis is not simply that we don’t have a clear idea of what beauty is or why it matters; our crisis is that we no longer care to ask the question. To the degree we think about beauty, we reduce it to matters of taste. This subjectivizing of beauty has serious consequences, and not only as regards the search for truth. Young people need as much as ever to discover the joy of a Mozart concerto; the pain, angst,

and triumph of a Mahler symphony; the exquisite tension of Brahms; the infinite ingenuity and piety of Bach. The Four Seasons aren't *The Four Seasons*. Unless truth retains its intimate connection to a more fulsome notion of beauty, it too becomes highly subjectivized. It's little wonder then that our notions of what is good suffer the same fate, buttressing themselves through humanitarian sentiment rather than individual obligation.

This struggle against subjectivism shouldn't be misconstrued. I'm referring here to a set of standards and cultural artifacts that can make some headway on the depths of human longing, and suggesting that colleges do themselves a disservice when they ignore such. A simple affirmation of what is good or beautiful has more power than a hundred criticisms of what is wrong, and affirmation and criticism shape the soul in different ways. Professors on both the left and the right suffer from a tendency to negativity. Indeed, by elevating "critical" thinking over mere thinking or, worse still, over piety, we put students in an adversarial relationship to their culture.

The appeal of negativity only lasts so long. The mind may open, but eventually it wants to close on something. Affirmation compels assent more than negation does. This is, of course, part of the appeal of identity politics, and simply complaining about it reinforces that appeal. The key is to present an attractive alternative. Part of that must involve building relationships with students, relationships grounded in a shared academic enterprise. Students will quickly realize that if you don't care about their politics you are much more likely to care about them.

Sticking to teaching what the school pays you to teach makes this all the easier. If Plato is to be trusted, "do your job" is a principle of justice, for it leads to a harmonious balancing of elements. Part of doing your job also means not doing someone else's job, and not letting someone else tell you how to do your job. I'm not the president of the college. I am free to let him know how I see things, especially if asked, but I am not free to tell him how to do things. One obvious reason for this is that I'm not required to attend to the big picture, nor to attend to all the different stakeholders and interests; nor, for that matter, am I responsible for the decisions that get made. Accountability is related to office and function; faculty who weigh in on how the college ought to be run should be reminded it's easy to make those calls from a couch.

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"Doing your job" makes academic work all that much more attractive and keeps it from being polluted. Politicization necessarily divides the class and creates fear in the classroom. But sticking to a subject matter frees students up because the emphasis is on what's being talked about and not about either the intentions of the speaker or the effects of such speech on someone else in the classroom. A lot of disagreement can be handled with the simple question, *Is it true?*


Colleges and universities may be independent of society, but they are not separate from it. They operate within a historical context, one that can cruelly sort out institutions. My alma mater, Calvin College, has spent the past 10 years gutting the humanities and social sciences, slashing programs and faculty positions, but also now building a \$22 million business building. The message is clear, and the school is in the process of becoming something other than what it was. On a macro level, many schools will fail altogether, and others will survive only by becoming something different. The sad fact is that the market can't bear the weight of colleges being the kinds of institutions I've described. But for those that have the capacity to be so, they ought to pursue the path unabashedly. The result will be a pluralized educational environment that provides possibilities of technical training, action, and contemplation that reflect the fullness of life. **RL**

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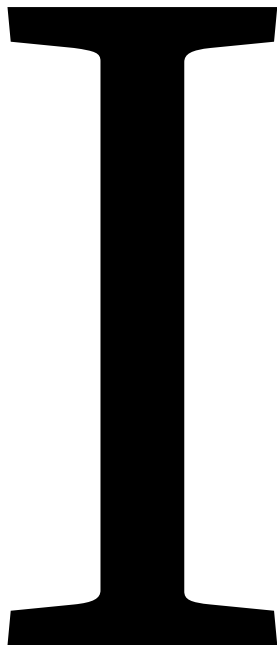


FAITHFULNESS IS THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH

by CARL TRUEMAN



To regain its reputation, authority, and influence, the church in the world must first be faithful to the gospel in teaching and practice. But it must also be the place where awe and wonder before a holy God can captivate even the nonbeliever.



IT IS CLEAR TO EVEN the most casual observer of the religious world in America that churches today face significant challenges to their public reputation, challenges that have undermined everything from their capacity to speak with authority in the public square to their ability to command loyalty from their own members. Is there any hope that this situation may be reversed, or are the churches in the West now doomed to slow but inexorable decline? As Matthew Arnold likened the sea of faith receding in Victorian society to the long, melancholy groan of the tide withdrawing along Dover Beach, are we merely to resign ourselves to a retreat into oblivion that

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might at best have some scrap of dignity but at worst merely continue the embarrassing chaos of the past two decades?

To answer that question, it is first useful to outline the nature of the problems that have brought traditional Christian churches to this moment. There are, of course, the obvious matters of hypocrisy and moral corruption. The child abuse and financial scandals within the Roman Catholic Church, combined with the institutionalized cover-ups of the same, are the most infamous examples of such. Yet Protestantism, too, has its equivalents and the only reason it has perhaps proved less notorious in the public imagination is due to its fragmentation, rendering the scandals more piecemeal and less visible on the national scale. For both expressions of Christianity, however, such corruption renders any public statement that claims the moral high ground on a wide variety of issues implausible, if not downright hypocritical, in the eyes of the public and indeed many Christians.

Beyond the scandals, there is the general tilt against traditional institutional authority. This does

not merely affect churches, as attitudes toward political institutions indicate. But it does hit churches particularly hard because, unlike the Senate, for example, they are not necessary for society to function. Churches have a voluntary dimension that has always meant that their authority is highly attenuated. Freedom of religion is a very good thing, but it does shift power toward the congregant, who can easily behave like a customer, and away from the clergy, who may find that they have to behave more like salespeople to attract and keep their flock. And in a world where institutional authority in general is seen as less and less plausible, today even the attenuated church power of the recent past starts to look exceptionally ambitious.

To all this we might add the role of technology. The invention of the automobile might be said to have been the real shattering blow to church authority, as it allowed individuals easy access to an even greater range of churches. Now the internet has more or less abolished geography in its entirety. A person in Florida can, if he or she wishes, be part of a church service in Rome as long as it is streamed on the web. And this can be at a time of the person's choosing. We might say that technology in the form of the internet has not only further eroded institutional power in practice, but it has also reshaped how we imagine our relationship to the church. The customer now really can be king over space and time. And the time of COVID served to supercharge this because most, if not all, Christians had to worship online for a time,

and many priests and pastors have seen their returning congregations diminished as a result.

In light of these problems, how might the church recover its integrity and authority?

The first thing to note is that credibility with the world outside the church is not something to be desired in an unqualified manner. The New Testament makes it clear that the church is not a continuous part of the wider culture. The message of the cross is foolishness to Greeks and an offense to Jews, as Paul argues in 1 Corinthians. That sets limits to the church's plausibility in the wider culture and indicates that a church that is not at some level offensive to that wider culture is likely not articulating the gospel in a correct manner. Christians are, to use Peter's language, sojourners and exiles or, in the cliché of earlier generations of believers, in the world but not of it. This is not an excuse for gratuitous offense or implausibility, but it is a reminder that being repudiated by the secular world is not necessarily a sign that the church is at fault.

This is particularly true today. For many centuries, the terms of recognition, or membership, in civic society have been broadly consistent with the terms of recognition in the church because both shared the same broad moral vision. For example, in the year 1900, while Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and atheists disagreed over significant religious issues, most were in agreement over, say, the fact that marriage should be between one man and one woman, and that for life



except in exceptional circumstances. And when the moral vision of society as a whole is shared broadly, religious differences can then be happily assigned to the pre-political realm, where they will cause little or no broader social tension.

This is not the situation today. The broad moral vision of America in 1900 has crumbled and been replaced by competing moral visions that have created a highly contested public square. Further, the politics has become increasingly psychologized in response to the rise of the therapeutic self for whom inner feelings are central to well-being. In this new world, the failure to affirm particular identities is seen as an act of oppression and even at times described using the language of violence. Combine this with the rise of social media, whereby all of life can be performed in public, and we have a world that has erased the boundary between public and private and also abolished the pre-political realm.

This new situation makes personal religious convictions a matter of heated public interest. Now to hold to the traditional view of Christian marriage is to run afoul of one of the terms of recognition in secular society, because in doing so the Christian fails to affirm the legitimacy of an identity and a relationship that said society has already deemed legitimate. The Christian's belief looks like bigotry, and there is

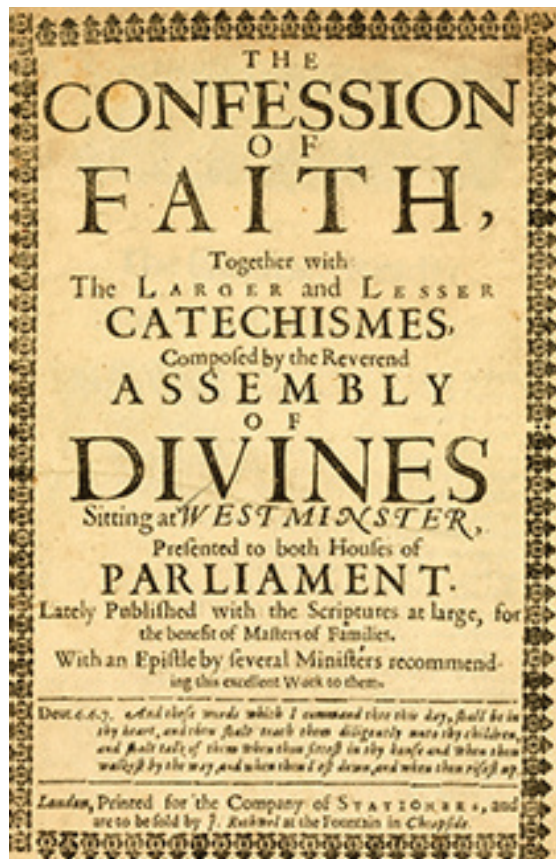
no context in which holding such a view is deemed warranted or permissible. Christians are faced with a situation that has perhaps not been seen widely in the West since the fourth century: To be both a good church member and a good citizen has become increasingly difficult. Difficult choices will have to be made in the coming years.

Two things now seem obvious. First, the church will become smaller. We have already witnessed this over the past few decades, and COVID has served merely to accelerate the process. As church membership becomes more costly, the decline will likely continue for some time. Second, the church will lose even more credibility in the wider culture because it will look increasingly bigoted and detached from what society regards as reality. This is not a cause for rejoicing, but neither is it reason for despair. It is simply the cost it pays for fidelity in the world in which she—and we—now find ourselves.

Given that this wider social context severely restricts the possibility of the church regaining credibility, the church's primary task is to regain credibility with regard to its own creed, code, and cult relative to its own constituency. The clergy need to demonstrate to congregants, and congregants need to demonstrate to each other, that they take the church's own teaching, its own morality, and its own worship seriously.

What might this look like? Regarding teaching, here the differences between Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox become significant, as the creeds of each, along with the practical emphases that arise from these, are different in key ways. Catholicism and Orthodoxy will inevitably have a sacramental focus, while Protestantism will likely emphasize preaching and proclamation. Yet even as these diverse theologies manifest themselves in diverse practices, I would suggest that both Catholicism and Orthodoxy (and many Protestants!) need to learn from the traditional Protestant emphasis on preaching and catechesis. Given the many challenges now faced by believers in everyday life, Christians need to be taught the whole counsel of God so they can think through these challenges carefully and virtuously in a manner that enables them to respond. For example, if a transgender colleague demands that co-workers acknowledge their chosen gender identity, how should the Christian respond? Regular Sunday churchgoing might be a regular part

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Title page to a 1658 edition of the Westminster Standards

of someone's devotional life, but only knowledge of the Bible's inviolable and enduring teaching on man and woman will enable an individual to think through the issue. And that requires positive teaching of the whole counsel of God. So one step toward solidifying the church in the face of our culture of moral anarchy is to teach Christian people Christian truths.

Yet there is more to this than simply teaching the Christian faith. Part of the problem the church faces is that it lacks credibility even with its own people, not because its teachings are in themselves implausible, but because the church's behavior relative to those teachings has made them implausible. As noted above, sex scandals make the church's teaching about sex seem insubstantial because it appears as hypocrisy. In fact, the issue of credibility and plausibility is even deeper than that. The intuitions of the modern mind tilt against Christian teaching because of its assertion of external authority, an authority that insists that we are made in the image of God and that we have a given moral shape to which we must

conform if we are to be truly human. To use Charles Taylor's term, the modern social imaginary makes the notion of individual autonomy intuitive, and any assertion otherwise seems to lack plausibility. And Christians, too, are profoundly shaped by this.

In short, it is not just the church's hypocrisy that makes Christian teaching hard to accept; it is also the moral imagination of the modern person that does so. And so the church has to address the problem at the level of the imagination, too. And both the hypocrisy and the imagination problem require that the church embody its teaching in the code by which it lives.

This can take numerous forms. In ethical teaching, the church needs to be consistent in how it applies Christian principles. Thus, for example, to accept no-fault divorce but to object to gay marriage is incoherent. The former teaches people that marriage is a sentimental bond for the mutual happiness of the contracting parties, to be dissolved when one or both partners decides that the arrangement is no longer providing that. That is essentially the same logic as the latter and is a clear contradiction of the Bible's teaching. Such inconsistency is hypocrisy. And yet the church's teaching on marriage must also capture the imagination. It is not enough to be consistent on the issue; the church must encourage and cultivate strong, beautiful marriages that capture the imagination of its people.

This example points to one way in which the church can engage the broader culture. It must be a loving community. Christ himself pointed to love as a key apologetic tool when he declared that the love Christians have for one another would be the way people would know them as his disciples. Love has been eviscerated of meaningful content in the wider culture, with the statement "love is love" unwittingly indicating the reduction of the idea to vacuous rhetoric. It is here that the church has an obvious opportunity to build bridges. By being a community that cares for its own and extends that care to those outside, Christians can foster a social framework that provides a plausibility structure for Christian teaching.

This may look different in different places. Community life in a rural town or village is inevitably not the same as that in an urban setting. The key is that each congregation finds a way to be a loving community in the context in which it finds itself. Communities offer places to belong, and they shape our intuitive understanding of the world and our place within it. And at a time when traditional

communities are breaking down and where the wafer-thin alternatives offered by the internet are leaving so many people feeling anxious and alienated, real community in real time and space with real embodied people has to be attractive. Our current state of social disintegration might actually be a first-class opportunity for the church to shine as a city on a hill. It is surely significant that the gift of hospitality is a New Testament qualification for eldership, for the church is to be characterized by precisely this virtue.

This is one reason why it would be unfortunate if lamentation were the only response we have to the increasing marginalization of the church. Lamentation is certainly appropriate and indeed a basic function of the fact that the church is always a church in exile this side of the eschaton. That many churches in the United States are unaccustomed to lamentation might be a sign that they have become too comfortable in the culture and thus ill-prepared for the reality now confronting us. Yet if all we do is lament, that is a missed opportunity. Marginal communities are typically strong communities, as Jews in medieval Europe and nonconformists in 18th- and 19th-century Britain and African Americans during segregation demonstrate. Marginality might be just the catalyst needed to make the smaller, leaner church that is merging into a truly cohesive and solid communal entity.

And yet the church is more than an institution that maintains a creed, more than a loving, nurturing community. It is also a worshiping body, and this cultic aspect must not be neglected. Indeed, if the battle for the modern mind is a battle of ideas but also of the imagination, then worship is key. With its various liturgical actions, involving proclamation and response, prayer and confession, words and music, and, of course, the sacraments, worship is something that grips the whole person and the whole congregation. As Christians participate in worship, so they are transformed, often imperceptibly and incrementally, in all ways, from the way they think to the way they relate to each other.

Further, if the worship service takes seriously the holiness of God and the power of God's grace, it must inevitably infuse a sense of reverence, awe, and wonder into the participant, something that Paul declares should be evident even to a non-Christian who happens to wander into such a gathering. It should not be, as I recently heard someone describe the services at his own church, "a Coldplay concert followed by a TED talk." This should also give pause for thought over

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online worship. Such might be necessary in extreme circumstances, as in the early stages of the COVID pandemic or for people unable to attend church in person for some serious reason, but it should neither be normative nor treated as an acceptable substitute for worship involving physical presence. The holiness of God—rather like the love of a community—cannot be effectively mediated via a screen.

Now, worship is a controversial area, discussion of which often degenerates rapidly into acrimonious debates between those who favor traditional forms and those who opt for more contemporary styles. Yet whatever one's tastes may be, it is vital that worship communicate an adult ethos and instill in people a sense of the seriousness of the undertaking. Worship should not be a function of the modern social imaginary, where authenticity is identified with self-expression. It should be a contradiction of that social



Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas

imaginary, pressing the individual to find his or her true humanity in the corporate body of Christ.

Thus, for example, corporate singing in the worship service is of critical importance. In this action, the believer acts freely, singing the words and following the tune as an individual, intentional act. And yet in so doing, individuals do not so much express themselves in some autonomous way; rather, they become part of the whole and, in a sense, lose their individual identity. Our individual freedom and our corporate belonging are beautifully tied together without tension or difficulty. And that is in a sense a microcosm of the whole service: Individual believers find their true identity through participation in the corporate action of worship, addressed by God as part of his people and responding to him in like manner.

None of the above offers an easy solution to the church's problem of credibility or authority. There is little doubt that, as far as the wider culture is concerned, the church's reputation is seriously, maybe fatally, damaged. But the promise to the church—that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it—remains regardless of the corruption that infects its inner being and the opposition that comes from without. Yet the answer to the church's problem in this age is the answer to the church's problem in every age: faithfulness to the

gospel message in teaching, practice, and worship, and to the fact that believers are made in the image of God, redeemed by the blood of his Son, and called to reflect his character to the world around. Accepting that faithfulness today will inevitably place the church at odds with the world and will likely cause a decline in numbers in the immediate future, it must press on, focusing on living consistently with its own teachings, being a community marked by love, and worshiping in a manner that befits a redeemed people before a holy God. Such a strategy might seem remarkably trite on paper, but simply because something is trite does not mean it is not true. Sometimes the simplest strategies are the correct ones. **RL**

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ART WILL FIND A WAY

by JOSEPH BOTTUM



**Words fail us because everything
has become political, some kind of
propaganda, either ingested or invented,
and great art no longer matters because
what it means to be human no longer
matters. And yet, old churches still arrest
our gaze and stories still need to be told.**





WE DON'T HAVE A LOT OF good ways to judge what makes an art important to civilization. Sales and popularity are generally insufficient guides: We intuitively know that Michelangelo produced superior art, regardless of how many copies of Robert Indiana's 1960s pop-art *Love* image were sold. (You can't escape knowing it: a pair of stacked letters, with the O tilted so it looks as though the L were kicking it, in saturated red, green, and blue taken from old gas-station advertisements.) Or, for that matter, Farrah Fawcett's 1976 red-swimsuit picture, which is often said to be the bestselling poster (and thus, by one definition, the bestselling reproduced artwork) of all time.

Or think of music. Edgar Allan Poe curiously remarked in 1849, "There are few cases in which mere popularity should be considered a proper test of merit, but the case of song-writing is, I think, one of the few." Perhaps it's fortunate that he didn't live to hear 1970s AM radio, spared a decade that made No. 1 hits of Chuck Berry's "My Ding-a-Ling" (1972), Paul Anka's "Having My Baby" (1974), the Starland Vocal Band's "Afternoon Delight" (1976), and Rupert Holmes's piña colada song (1979). However we judge, say, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, in just about everyone's estimation it finishes ahead of the Captain & Tennille's "Muskrat Love"—a 1976 radio hit about muskrats nibblin' on bacon and chewin' on cheese while having muskrat sex: "Anything goes as they wiggle, / and Sue starts to giggle."

Still, there is one rough-and-ready way to gauge the place held by certain arts and cultural activities: Through most of the twentieth century, we knew an enterprise mattered if the Soviet Union invested time, money, and tyrannical brutality into trying to be the best in the world at it.

That's an imperfect measure, of course. The cultural products produced entirely from individual genius aren't fully susceptible to state manipulation, even if the Soviets agreed that they mattered. Worse, the individual geniuses of those arts had a regrettable tendency to deviate from the party line. Think of the novel as an art form. There's a limit to readers' willingness to accept the relentless political messaging in, say, Yuri Krymov's 1938 *The Tanker "Derbent"* or Nikolai Ostrovsky's 1936 *How the Steel Was Tempered*—and those two novels were among the best of the socialist-tinged social realism demanded by the Soviet literary censors. The misadventures of the likes of Boris Pasternak and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn seemed common enough that the USSR always felt uneasy about fiction writers. And poets. And anyone working alone.

But some things could be pushed along by group effort, by investing in coaches, and by grabbing the talented when very young and immuring them in state-run training schools. Ballet, for example. Chess. Playing the violin and piano and cello—the instruments of classical music. Olympic sports. Even painting and sculpture. Opera, for that matter. The Italian

and German librettos of most previously acknowledged great operas made it a more problematic art form, but the USSR was full of attempts at operatic greatness. Tikhon Khrennikov—longtime head of the Union of Soviet Composers—composed such works as the 1939 *Into the Storm* (based on a novel by the most lickspittle of party lackies, Nikolai Virta), and Dmitry Kabalevsky created the 1938 *Colas Breugnon*, to say nothing of operas by such genuinely good composers as Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich.

In the West, the Soviet efforts at culture made unlikely Cold War heroes out of the likes of Van Cliburn at the piano and Bobby Fischer at the chessboard—but even that odd duo managed to show the broad agreement, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, about what constituted the classic work of Western civilization.

Perhaps we could make the case that the Cold War lent a moral seriousness to the politics of the West: For all the silliness of the 1960s and 1970s, even as ameliorative a personality as Jimmy Carter came at last to see that the struggle against the USSR was real. And similarly, we could make the case that the Cold War lent a cultural seriousness to the traditional arts of civilization. The Soviets needed great ballet dancers and symphony orchestras so they could demonstrate

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Michelangelo's ceiling for the Sistine Chapel

to the world that the cultural deposit of civilization had gone with them down the path of communism. The West needed great opera halls and Shakespeare companies to insist that civilization continued best under the freedoms of democratic capitalism.

The Cold War ended long ago, of course. Andrei Gromyko and John Foster Dulles share the darkness. Khrushchev and Eisenhower are no more. And perhaps not coincidentally, the traditional arts have, in the long years since, slid down into near terminal decline. A standard list of good operas from the 20th century includes Igor Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, Benjamin Britten's *Turn of the Screw*, and Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land*—all from the 1950s. And what did the post-Soviet world give us? Alfred Schnittke's 1992 *Life with an Idiot*, maybe, or Karlheinz Stockhausen's 1998 *The Light Operas*, but they don't have much cultural resonance—or harmonic resonance, for that matter.

As in opera, so in all the other old cultural activities. Name a traditional art, something rooted in the ancient practices of the civilization, from painting to poetry. And, as a general rule, the last truly world-significant example you can name in that will probably be no more recent than the 1950s. Certainly from sometime before the 1990s. Something went out of us in the dying fall of the Soviet Union. The balloon deflated with the sad, flatulent sound of, say, a Philip Glass composition.

A balloon might be the exact metaphor, for even while the struggle against the Soviets kept the traditional arts alive, it also kept them artificially inflated. They were ready to fail for any number of reasons, and when the end of the Cold War loosened the knot, those arts dissipated into the air with a speed possible only for the synthetically maintained. The 1960s and 1970s already contained the promise of the demise of the cultural consensus—the middlebrow agreement that the arts mattered to education in shared knowledge. The theater critic Terry Teachout once conceived the idea of asking critics in various artistic disciplines to name the great modern works of their field—dance, symphony, sculpture, painting, poetry, novels—and not a single answer he received was from after the first decades of the twentieth century. So why were our arts declining, long before the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed them to fail?

The answer isn't aesthetic. True genius comes where it will, and no culture is going to create a Shakespeare simply by its cultural conditions. A

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culture can *prevent* a Shakespeare, however: When world-historical artistic geniuses appear, there has to be a ground on which they can flourish. Otherwise they simply never produce the art that manifests their genius, and they slip away unremembered.

And what we have been missing for nearly a century is such a ground. Our artists are probably as talented, in some sense, as the artists of any age. But they cannot bring their work to the kind of flower that even, say, second-tier composers could in the high ages of classical music. We do not have an aesthetic problem but a cultural one: We have lost the shared agreement of artist and audience that certain arts *matter*. We lack a shared metaphysics by which to explain art.

“Beauty cannot be loved fruitfully if it is loved only for the pleasures it gives,” Marcel Proust once wrote. “Aesthetic pleasure is a mere by-product which comes to us if we love beauty for itself, as something real which exists outside ourselves and is infinitely more important than the joy it gives us.” Only if beauty is real, he realizes, can we have joy in it—and, by implication, make beautiful art.

We could go back to Matthew Arnold’s attempt to substitute high art for what he perceived as the receding sea of faith—where we seek out “the best that is known and thought in the world.” It is this that, in some sense, gave us the middlebrow assumptions of the 1950s about the Great Books and the Great Composers and the Great Artworks. But it was a fragile, insubstantial notion, and it gave us as well the subsequent sneer at it all as snobbery and pretentiousness. The modern crisis of art is essentially that we do not know as a culture what we want or what

our purpose is. We no longer believe that there exists a real order, beyond ourselves, of the true and false, good and bad, right and wrong.

That’s not to say that the cultural sharing of a metaphysics, a sense of reality, meant unremitting chauvinism about the culture. In my 2020 book, *The Decline of the Novel*, I pointed out that, for almost 300 years, the novel was a major art form, perhaps the major art form, of the modern world—the device by which, more than any other, we tried to explain ourselves to ourselves.

And as an art form, the novel—from its High Victorian peak through its full modernist ambition—was often engaged in brutal criticism of the culture in which it appeared. But that criticism of the culture’s present proceeded from a curious lack of criticism about the possibilities of the culture’s future. The novel generally contained what we might call a *confident critique*, born from an assumption of strength and worthiness—born, most of all, from an assumption of access to the great truths of morality and the structures of the universe by which we could find a guide.

In other words, the sins of Western culture could be criticized in the highest tones of moral outrage because few readers doubted that Western culture was called to something higher. Our failures could be mocked with the most vicious comedy because those failures were perceived as actually *failures*, as authors and their readers alike knew. Confidence in the general frame of culture allowed a useful, socially advancing complaint about the ill-fit and corrupt elements held within that frame. The novel was a device for understanding and improving ourselves within an accepted cultural setting of belief in the possibility of understanding and improvement. And when we turned, as many artists did, to an *unconfident critique*, criticism of the setting itself—when we turned, as many artists did, to a desire to smash the frame—the novel in its social aspect ceased to be as useful as it had once seemed.

All this is testimony, I think, to the current problem of culture’s lack of belief in itself, derived from the fading of a temporal horizon. As I said in *The Decline of the Novel*, we walk with our heads down. History appears to have no discernible aim, and culture no visible end. Without a sense of the old goals and reasons—a sense of the good achieved, understood as progress—all that remains are the crimes the culture committed in the past to get where it is now. Uncompensated by achievement, unexplained by purpose, these



Westminster Abbey in London

unameliorated sins must seem overwhelming: the very definition of the culture. For that matter, without a sense of the old goals and reasons, why should we strain for the future? Why, indeed, should we write or even read book-length fiction for insight into the directions of the culture and the self?

And so, generally speaking, we don't bother much with those books anymore. We don't teach them in college in any systematic way. We don't expect that even the educated will have a sure sense of the form. The local libraries have given up on acting as repositories of literary history, moving a few copies of Dickens and Hemingway to the "Young Adults" section and pulping the rest. Although their positions in universities derive from the prestige that literature once possessed, literary scholars now study, for example, the dated pornography of naughty French postcards with the same tools and the same enthusiasms they once used for the novel; the typical English department in the United States has more professors with a specialty or subspecialty in movies than in anything else.

The newer arts rise and fall faster, lacking the 300 years of the novel or classical music. Television went through something like a new golden age in the early 2000s, but the impetus appears to be dying out. Movies, too. Video games. Comic books and graphic novels. The failure of the culture's metaphysical sense is killing them off, and in a way that can be easily discerned. In the absence of a sense of a supernatural order, the only external reality that can be seen is the political. Art is always defined by its relation to the real beyond the self. In previous ages, that was a

relation to such things as an enduring human nature, God, and beauty. In the current age, the relation is to political causes. All art is political, we're told—and rightly so. For what else is there?

In many ways, the communists anticipated this. The most fascinating question of the Moscow Show Trials of the 1930s is how some of the accused came to believe in their own guilt, even when they knew they had not committed the acts for which they were accused. As writers from Maurice Merleau-Ponty to Arthur Koestler saw, their confessed guiltiness was not particularized but general: They had become symbols of counter-revolution, and thus their best service to the revolution would be to confess as repentant counter-revolutionaries.

In the summer of 2018, *The Nation* published "How-To" by a poet named Anders Carlson-Wee. The poem offers advice to panhandlers on the best way to wheedle cash out of the passersby: "If you're crippled don't / flaunt it. Let em think they're good enough / Christians to notice." The Twitter mob quickly turned on the poem, declaring it offensive in its "ableism" and use of what they claimed was "black voice" by a white poet. Within a month, *The Nation* had removed the poem from its website and posted in its place an apology and promise to do better from the editors.

The incident was, in some ways, a typical caving of an institution to what it perceived as overwhelming popular anger (though the numbers involved didn't reach more than a few hundred). The parallel to the Moscow Show Trials came when the poet himself apologized for the poem. The poem had become

a lightning rod for complaint about oppression of minorities, and for that he was guilty, even though he had never intended to oppress those minorities. In fact, he thought he was attacking the right object: white Christians with money.

The attacks on Lin-Manuel Miranda's 2021 film *In the Heights* and Steven Spielberg's 2021 remake of *West Side Story* for being incorrectly diverse: We could come up with hundreds of other examples. And under such conditions, what art can be made? Every such example tightens the screws, making art more anodyne, more repetitive of tropes and images that have avoided attack, more obviously political.

And yet in a political age, there is nothing but politics. We cannot defend a work of art on the grounds that it is beautiful, for beauty is not real outside our perception of it. We cannot defend art on the grounds of deep insight into human nature, for the idea of human nature is only a political construct. We cannot defend art on the grounds of truth, for art is only good or bad if it entertains in politically approved ways and instructs in politically approved lessons.

That's not to say art today is impossible. In his 1983 sci-fi novel *Citadel of the Autarch*, Gene Wolfe creates a tour-de-force scene in which a character—allowed to speak only in the official clichés of a totalitarian regime—tells a story. Another character translates it into common speech to reveal the story's cleverness and pathos, despite its verbal

limitations. But we are limited these days, like the storyteller under totalitarians, in what we can say and what we can portray, because we gave up the theological and metaphysical foundations of culture. Our art didn't fail us. We failed our art.

And yet, like weeds that claw a thin existence in the crevices between slabs of concrete paving, genuine art will always find a way to live. Human nature is not eradicated by the attempt to deny it. The truth of beauty will not be erased from the cosmos by redefinition. The divine cannot be slain by the willful refusal to perceive it. No matter how much the world beyond the self is believed to be only the power structures of politics, eternal truths remain real beyond the political.

This is the turn Philip Larkin makes at the end of "Church Going"—the poem in which he perceives the end of British Christendom and the emptiness of British churches, only to realize of the church at which he stopped:

*A serious house on serious earth it is,
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious.*

Talent is constant, or nearly so, in every age, but talent can produce genuine art because some human beings discover in themselves a desire to be more serious—to see deeper into the ineluctable facts that we die, that babies are born, that the world lies in sin, that beauty is real.

As Leo Strauss saw in his 1952 *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, other ages lived under intellectual and social regimes that controlled tightly what could and could not be said. Ours is not nearly the worst in physical persecution, although it may be unique in redefining everything as political, which requires that the public close its eyes in holy dread to larger swaths of reality than any culture has ever done before.

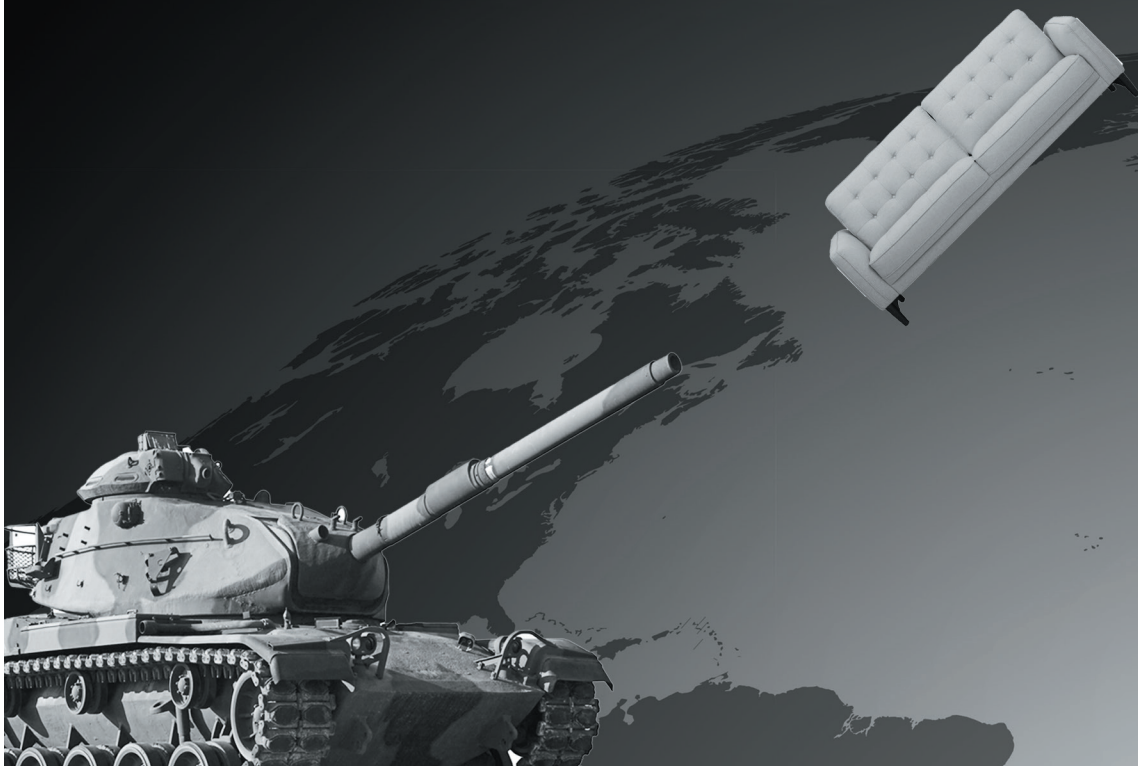
Still, the writers of other ages found, in Strauss' famous terms, esoteric ways to put their dangerous ideas in exoteric publications. And so may we, hinting at what lies beyond politics—until the culture is ready to hear the truth, shouted in great works of art, once again. **RL**

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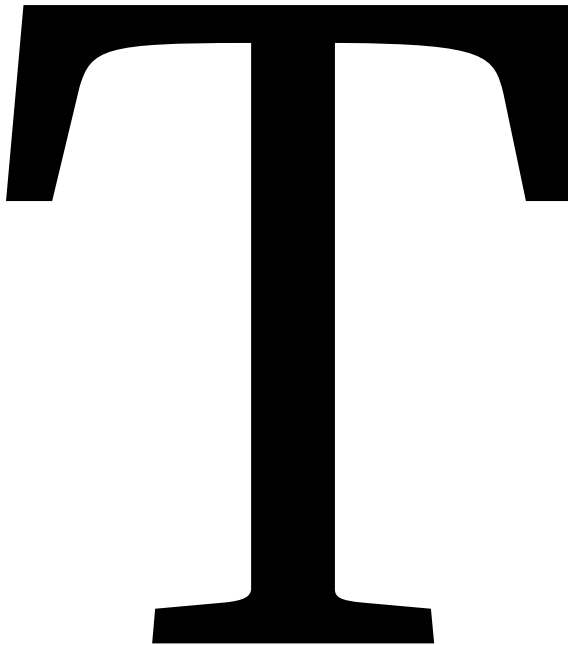
RESTORING THE CONSTITUTIONAL CASE FOR FREE TRADE

by ROSOLINO CANDELA



For years, under both Democratic and Republican administrations, the U.S. has been pursuing policies detrimental to international free trade—a threat not only to domestic prosperity but also to world peace. Here’s a blueprint to reverse course and prevent disaster.





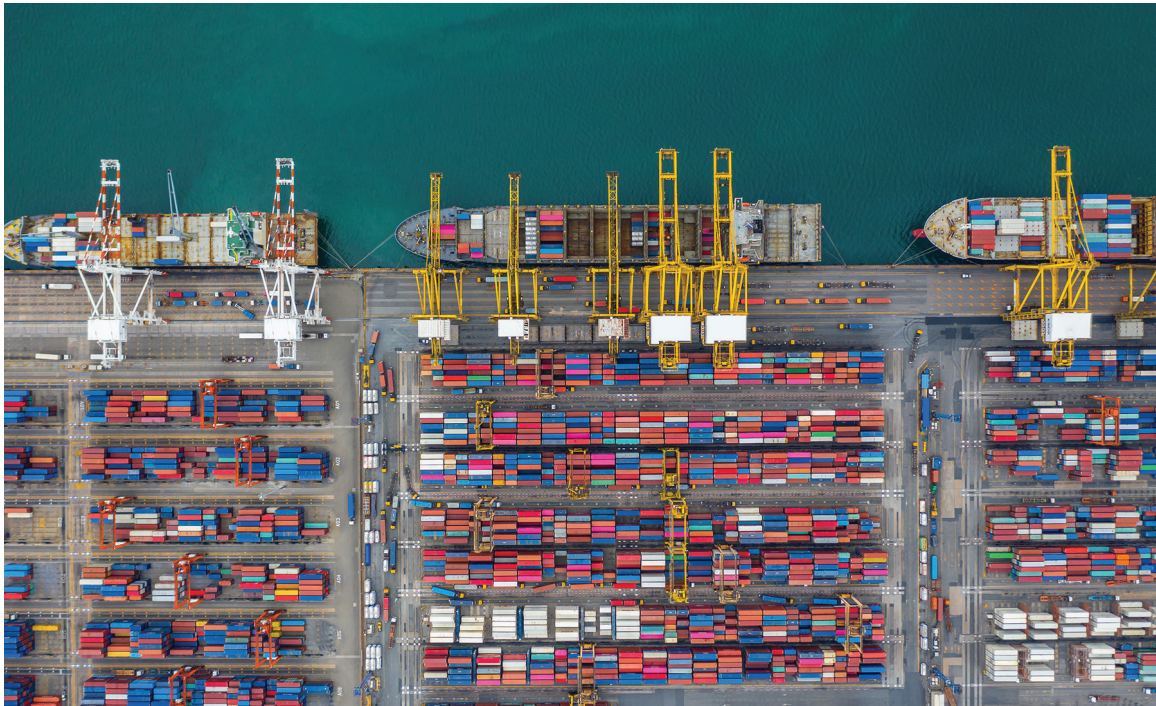
THE CASE FOR INTERNATIONAL free trade, and the political role that the United States has played in shaping international trade policy, has consistently provoked controversy, particularly in recent years. However, since the Great Depression, the U.S. has nevertheless taken the lead in setting the agenda for a policy of freer trade across all nations. The Smoot-Hawley tariff of 1930, which pushed the average tariff on imports to 50%, was among the most important factors that deepened the Great Depression, later solidifying the political case for an economic policy of multilateral free trade. U.S. secretary of state for the FDR administration, Cordell Hull, became

the primary architect of a new economic policy. Although he is better known as “the Father of the United Nations,” Hull also played a crucial role in the formation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which was the forerunner of the World Trade Organization (WTO). For his efforts in fostering international peace, Hull was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1945. Hull’s policies were based on the belief that free trade was a positive-sum game leading not only to economic prosperity but also to international peace. In effect, Hull heeded the words attributed to the French economist Frédéric Bastiat, who is often quoted as saying, “If goods don’t cross borders, armies will.”

Unfortunately, both in rhetoric and practice, U.S. trade policy has increasingly retreated from multilateral free trade as a means of promoting peace and prosperity. Instead, however much disguised in “free trade” rhetoric, discussions of international trade have become increasingly antagonistic. Although President Obama secured the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which would have reduced trade barriers between 11 countries around the Pacific Rim, including Japan, trade policy has remained framed in terms of protecting American workers from unfair competition, particularly from China. For example, in his State of the Union address on January 20, 2015, President Obama asserted that

21st-century businesses, including small businesses, need to sell more American products overseas. Today our businesses export more than ever, and exporters tend to pay their workers higher wages. But as we speak, China wants to write the rules for the world’s fastest-growing region. That would put our workers and businesses at a disadvantage. Why would we let that happen? We should write those rules. We should level the playing field. That’s why I’m asking both parties to give me trade promotion authority to protect American workers, with strong new trade deals from Asia to Europe that aren’t just free, but fair.

This inflammatory political rhetoric on trade was then put into practice by President Trump’s series of retaliatory tariffs and trade war with China. Perhaps more than any other president in the post-WWII era, President Trump retreated from a policy of multilateral and freer trade in favor of greater protectionism. Not only did Trump withdraw from the TPP agreement established by the Obama administration; he also erected trade barriers on imported steel, aluminum,



and other products. The Biden administration, unfortunately, has also sent mixed messages on trade policy. The president's Trade Agenda Report, released by the White House on March 1, 2021, states that trade policy "is an essential part of the Build Back Better agenda. Trade must protect and empower workers, drive wage growth, and lead to better economic outcomes for all Americans. The Biden Administration will review past trade policies for their impacts on, and unintended consequences for, workers." Although the report states that restoring "U.S. leadership around the world and repairing partnerships and alliances are Biden Administration priorities," which *seems* to reverse the course of the Trump administration on trade policy, it also signals a continued antagonistic posture toward China: "The Biden Administration recognizes that China's coercive and unfair trade practices harm American workers, threaten our technological edge, weaken our supply chain resiliency, and undermine our national interests."

Given that the Biden administration has claimed that its trade agenda is central to recovering from COVID-19, lifting underserved communities from poverty, and "building back better," the question that should be raised is, What is the most effective trade policy to achieve these stated objectives? I argue that the most effective way to meet these objectives is to *reclaim* our post-WWII commitment to a multilateral

free trade and to *restore* the constitutional basis for such trade policy. Such a commitment to multilateral free trade, which neither discriminates against nor favors particular parties through bilateral trade agreements, would extend to every trading partner of the U.S. the lowest possible tariffs, which ideally would be zero. Moreover, there is also a traditional American basis, if not always practice, for extending a multilateral posture toward international trade in a peaceful manner, going as far back as President George Washington's 1796 Farewell Address, in which he eloquently declared:

Harmony, liberal intercourse with all nations, are recommended by policy, humanity, and interest. But even our commercial policy should hold an equal and impartial hand; neither seeking nor granting exclusive favors or preferences; consulting the natural course of things; diffusing and diversifying by gentle means the streams of commerce but forcing nothing.

Before discussing how to restore the constitutional basis for such trade policy, it is important, first, to discuss some misperceptions about the nature of international free trade, along with its potential objectives, and reiterate the economic, political, and social benefits of free trade consistent with the national interest of the U.S.

One misperception about international trade is that it is based primarily on an increase in the exchange of goods and services consumed directly as final output across international borders. Think automobiles and appliances. Although the opponent of free trade might insist that freer trade implies that an increasing amount of goods and services will be purchased from abroad, there is an important reason why the slogan “Buy American” is misleading. What has driven international trade in the post-WWII era, particular for the U.S., is increased trade of *immediate* goods, or components used in the production of final consumer goods here in the U.S., creating more fine-grained specialization that transcends political borders. This trend is what international trade economist Douglas Irwin refers to in his book *Free Trade Under Fire* as “vertical specialization.” Although this increase in vertical specialization can be explained by a general decline in tariffs, quotas, and other trade barriers, another important yet relatively unknown factor that explains this international trend has been the advent of “containerization.” As Marc Levinson explains in his book *The Box*, Malcolm McLean, the pioneer of containerization, discovered in the 1950s a way to profit from a reduction in the cost of transporting goods: the utilization of cranes to transport containers directly onto truck trailers or railcars, thereby eliminating the process of loading and unloading by hand. Loading time was reduced from days to less than 8 hours on that maiden voyage of the first container ship, *Ideal-X*, in 1956, and according to Levinson reduced the cost of shipping from \$5.83 per ton to 15.8 cents per ton. According to estimates provided by Irwin, vertical specialization has accounted for about half the growth in U.S. trade since the 1960s and about a third of the increase in world trade since 1970. Because an increasing proportion of goods that are “made in America” include components and inputs from abroad, the notion that goods produced in the U.S. are 100% “American” has become increasingly inaccurate and therefore contrary to any plea to “Buy American.” Without those foreign components, or inputs, there would not be anything “American” to buy.

Clarifying this misperception also has important implications for protectionist policies. If indeed the Biden administration wishes to pursue a form of U.S. trade policy that is consistent with economic recovery from the pandemic and in a manner that uplifts poorer and underserved communities, then

reclaiming a policy of multilateral free trade is the most effective way of achieving this objective. Protectionist policies, intended to protect American jobs and drive wages north, will instead achieve the opposite effects. One basis for protectionism is what economists refer to as a “high-wage fallacy,” which suggests that American workers, who earn relatively higher wages than workers in developing countries, cannot compete internationally because labor costs are cheaper abroad. The key flaw in this argument is the conflation of wage rates and labor costs. This high-wage fallacy overlooks the fact that American workers earn higher wages because they have greater amounts of capital than workers in poorer countries. Such capital not only comes in the form of machines, such as tractors for farmers, drills for construction workers, laptop computers for office workers, and other technology. It also includes “human capital” with greater education and technological knowledge in particular trades, such as the development of computer software. The ability of American workers to produce a greater amount of output per hour implies they can produce such capital-intensive goods with less labor, and therefore at lower labor costs, compared to poorer countries whose workers have less physical and human capital. This also explains why the United States is a leading exporter of capital-intensive goods produced for final consumption, including aircraft, construction and mining equipment, and computer technology. It is also because of the capital-intensive nature of agriculture and the extraction of natural resources that food and natural gas make up a larger share of U.S. exports than imports. Therefore, whereas American workers tend to specialize in exporting capital-intensive goods, such as computer software, labor-intensive computer components required for such software design tend to be imported from abroad.

To the extent that American businesses have become increasingly reliant on cheaper inputs from abroad for their production of final goods, the erection of trade barriers will only increase U.S. production costs, since American workers will be redirected toward labor-intensive activities in which they are less efficient. This in turn will result in two other unintended effects. First, because greater protectionism will result in less specialization in capital-intensive production, there will be less capital accumulation, and therefore worker productivity will fall, resulting in lower wages, particularly among workers from underserved communities. Secondly,



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increased production costs will result in consumers paying higher prices for the goods they buy. In effect, contrary to the intention of the Biden administration, a deviation from multilateral free trade will fall disproportionately as a regressive tax on the poorest and least advantaged of Americans.

One misperception regarding bilateral “free trade” agreements is that they have resulted in freer trade. The international trend away from multilateral and nondiscriminatory free trade, as had been characterized by trade agreements extending equally across members under GATT, has been due to a relative increase in preferential trade agreements. Under GATT, which followed a “Most Favored Nation” (MFN) principle, any member of a trade treaty would receive the same lowest tariff enjoyed by the country acting as its signatory. Thus, if the U.S. and Italy agreed to a reduction in tariffs to 5%, all other countries would also benefit from the same trade reduction as well. However, the reality has been

that the rise of so-called free trade agreements is in fact the rise of what are known as “preferential trade agreements” (PTAs), which are intended to *manage* trade in a discriminatory manner, not enhance truly free trade in a multilateral manner. The proliferation of PTAs has unintentionally resulted in a “spaghetti bowl effect,” as dubbed by international economist Jagdish Bhagwati in his book *Termites in the Trading System*. Because trade agreements are not extended unilaterally, the spaghetti bowl effect requires hundreds of pages to outline “rules of origin,” product-specific requirements, and other regulations to specify between trading partners whether they are eligible for a preferential tariff rate.

Thus, to the extent that the Biden administration has proffered a trade agenda focused on economic growth and “reopening the economy” as it recovers from the pandemic, then multilateral free trade would be the most effective means of doing so. The reason for this is that PTAs, contrary to the perception that they provide the means of freeing trade, in fact manage trade by distorting trade and investment to the benefit of special interest groups. If PTAs were really about freeing trade, then they wouldn’t require hundreds of pages of regulation to specify the terms of trade. Instead, the complexity of PTAs, with all its “trade-related” specifications, are in reality a disguise for what economists refer to as “rent-seeking,” which is the expenditure of time and resources by individuals to acquire monopoly privileges, shielding them from competition in the market. The most harmful effect of rent-seeking, contrary to the stated intent of Biden’s trade agenda, is that it reduces economic growth, since special interest groups are not expending their entrepreneurial talent creating new wealth. Rather, it is a symptom of crony capitalism, since special interest groups are using their time and entrepreneurial skills in an unproductive manner—namely, by creating barriers to entry, all in the name of “free” or “fair” trade.

For example, much of the antagonism in U.S.-China trade relations has been over intellectual property protection. However, such antagonism is symptomatic of a more fundamental misperception, which undermines the basis of more productive trade relations, with China and other nations. Questions pertaining to intellectual property protection are about the definition and enforcement of property rights, whereas questions pertaining to international trade are about the exchange of goods and services over which property rights are already well established. As

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Bhagwati puts it, “Intellectual property protection has to do with collecting royalties, not with trade.” The point here is not to argue whether or not intellectual property rights should be enforced, but simply to establish that these are distinct issues, evidenced by the fact that another international organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), was established precisely to deal with legal matters regarding intellectual property. Moreover, it is also to make clear that the issue of intellectual property protection, which is often tied up with free trade, is actually a symptom of corporations using trade relations as a Trojan horse to rent-seek, namely by lobbying to sneak in trade-unrelated agendas in the name “free trade.” For example, pharmaceutical companies in the United States and other developed countries have lobbied for intellectual property protection, which protects their ability to charge higher prices in poorer countries. This, according to Irwin, “opens the door to many interests to use the threat of trade sanctions to achieve their own non-trade objectives, and thus puts the WTO in the business of enforcing behavior only tangentially related to trade.” Such preoccupation over the definition and enforcement of intellectual property undermines the WTO’s original purpose, which is to focus on the reduction of trade barriers. Moreover, clarifying this distinction between the enforcement of intellectual property rights and free trade, and separating these policy



issues between the WIPO and the WTO, respectively, would make current trade negotiations with China far more productive. Thus, the proliferation of PTAs in the name of “free trade” have only undermined the American tradition of multilateralism in trade policy due to crony capitalism, which jeopardizes the Biden agenda of reopening the economy onto the road of recovery.

The case for a U.S. policy of multilateral free trade is not just about economic growth for the least advantaged in society or reestablishing America’s political credibility in the international community. Perhaps most importantly, such a policy is in the best interest of the United States as a whole, since it provides the instrument necessary for international peace and decreasing the likelihood of a shooting war, not just a trade war, with China—or any other country for that matter. This principle has been known since the Enlightenment as the “*doux-commerce* thesis.” As Montesquieu states in *The Spirit of the Laws*: “Commerce is a cure for the

most destructive prejudices; for it is almost a general rule that wherever we find agreeable manners, there commerce flourishes; and that wherever there is commerce, there we meet with agreeable manners.” It is therefore no coincidence that the shooting war that took place internationally in the 1940s was preceded by an international trade war during the 1930s, which hastened the closure of the global economy as countries retaliated against each other with tariffs in an effort to shield themselves from the Great Depression. Moreover, it is easy for Americans to forget that, in the aftermath of World War II, what is known today as the European Union emerged out of the European Coal and Steel Community, established in 1950 between France, West Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. The purpose of this community, as stated by one of its architects, Robert Schuman, was declared in what is now known as the “Schuman Declaration” of May 9, 1950: “The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible.” Thus, the benefits of free trade are not only economic and political but also social.

Having made the policy case for multilateral free trade, how can the United States reclaim this lost tradition in trade policy? The answer requires restoring the constitutional basis for free trade. There are at least three ways in which to find the case for international free trade in the U.S. Constitution. One way, according to economists Milton and Rose Friedman in their book *Free to Choose*, is to modify Article I, Section 10, which currently specifies the following:

No State shall, without the Consent of the Congress, lay any Imposts or Duties on Imports or Exports, except what may be absolutely necessary for executing its inspection Laws: and the net Produce of all Duties and Imposts, laid by any State on Imports or Exports, shall be for the Use of the Treasury of the United States; and all such Laws shall be subject to the Revision and Control of the Congress.

Since the economic benefits of free trade apply to individual states, which were free and independent prior to the Union, and did not change after their political relationship changed, then it stands to reason that this economic principle still applies to individuals in Michigan or New York when they

trade with individuals in Italy or China. Hence, the Friedmans proposed the following amendment: “Congress shall not lay any imposts or duties on imports or exports, except what may be absolutely necessary for executing its inspection laws.”

Another avenue through which to restore the constitutional basis for free trade, according to Daniel Griswold, a senior research fellow at the Mercatus Center and co-director of its Trade and Immigration Project, would be to reassert Article 1, Section 8, of the U.S. Constitution. Known as the Commerce Clause, it empowers Congress to collect duties and “to regulate commerce with foreign nations.” However, rather than providing the basis for *preventing* the erection of trade barriers between the states and with foreign nations, it has become interpreted as the means *by which* to do so.

I would also argue that there is a third basis for the constitutional protection of free trade, the precedent for which is implicit to the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, written as follows:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

The key here is the phrase “the right of the people peaceably to assemble.” However much such an interpretation may seem far-fetched, my interpretation is not inconsistent with that of the U.S. Supreme Court. In the 1984 case *Roberts v. United States Jaycees*, the U.S. Supreme Court argued that “implicit in the right to engage in activities protected by the First Amendment” is “a corresponding right to associate with others in pursuit of a wide variety of political, social, economic, educational, religious, and cultural ends.” Since free trade is a form of voluntary association, a solution to restoring a U.S. policy of multilateral free trade would be to reassert and restore its constitutional basis in the First Amendment as a fundamental human right that ought not to be obstructed by Congress. **RL**

Rosolino Candela is a senior fellow in the F.A. Hayek Program for Advanced Study in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics and program director of Academic and Student Programs at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University.

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IN THE LIBERAL TRADITION

Linda Whetstone

(1942–2021)

By RICHARD TURNBULL

A LONG-TIME CHAMPION of free markets and individual liberty, Linda Whetstone passed away on December 15, 2021, shortly after participating in the Atlas Network's Freedom Forum and Liberty Dinner, age 79. If there could have been a more fitting final gathering for Whetstone, it's hard to think of one. Founded by her father, entrepreneur Sir Antony Fisher, the Atlas Network proudly proclaims its mission is to "remove barriers to opportunities and empower individuals," which perfectly summed up Whetstone's lifelong driving passion.

Born November 17, 1942, in Binfield, Berkshire, England, Whetstone earned an economics degree from the University of London. Her considerable influence on economic ideas was felt throughout numerous spheres, from the religious to the political, in fact anywhere where the principles and practices of a free society would act as a catalyst to promote human flourishing. Among her many commitments, Whetstone served as chairman of both the aforementioned Atlas Network and the board of Free Social Networks (through which she helped share tens of thousands of

"Ideas of a Free Society" CDs in more than 60 countries). She was also past president of the Mont Pelerin Society, whose founders include Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek, and Ludwig von Mises. The Society had always been close to her heart; she was just 17 years old when she attended her first meeting with her father. She also served as chairman and past president of her local Conservative Association.

Lest it be thought she existed purely in the realm of ideas, Whetstone and her husband, Francis, who served as a Conservative councillor, were also farmers who experienced firsthand the dead hand of subsidy with the Common Agricultural Policy of what was then the European Economic Community (later the European Union). She regarded the regime of subsidy as pernicious. She and Francis finally left farming altogether.

Remarkably, Whetstone also found time to bring her considerable skills into the equestrian world.

She loved riding and horses and became involved with dressage. She applied her skills here with the same passion and effectiveness as in the social, economic,



and political spheres. She helped train judges, held numerous positions within British Dressage, and was the association's chairman at the time of her death. She was also involved in restructuring the British Equestrian Federation, of which she was chairman for four years. Whetstone changed the sport that she loved with improved training, better governance, and new and innovative ideas.

I regard it as a privilege to have attended what was one of her last events in the U.K., a seminar on "Property Rights in Modern Islamic Countries." Whetstone moderated with her usual wisdom and modesty, but also great insight into issues around Islam and finance. As I listened to her observations and responses, it was the breadth of her passion for liberty that struck me, alongside a genuine humility.

Linda's interest in promoting liberty and freedom in an Islamic context further illustrates her pioneering spirit. She co-founded what became the Islam and Liberty Network, aimed at bringing together scholars and others concerned for the principles of freedom and liberty within Islam. She co-edited *Islamic Foundations of a Free Society*, published by the Institute of Economic Affairs. She recognized the central importance of free markets in religious contexts, whether her own Christian faith, Islam, or any other. She resisted the obsessions of governments, NGOs, churches, and charities with intergovernmental aid

as a solution to poverty; only enterprise and free trade would lead to real transformation.

If there is one theme that knits together all of Whetstone's many skills and accomplishments, it's that she understood the value of an institution. Many pioneers in the world of ideas have failed in the past because they did not give enough attention to the ongoing transmission of the ideas themselves. Whetstone recognized the need for networks, not as ends in themselves but as vehicles for the promotion, development, and spread of vital ideas and principles. To her, liberty, freedom, markets, and liberalism in its true and empowering form were not just laudable goals but opportunities to transform the world. She was an innovator and pioneer dedicated to the transformational power of these ideas, which she wanted spread far and wide so that all people, of whatever faith, geographical location, or socioeconomic standing, might flourish. **RL**

Rev. Dr. Richard Turnbull is director of the Centre for Enterprise, Markets and Ethics and a trustee of the Christian Institute. Turnbull holds both a first-class honors degree and a Ph.D. in theology from the University of Durham. He was ordained into the ministry of the Church of England in 1994.



Revolution Principles and American Conservatism Now

A new book by the author of *The Virtue of Nationalism* chastises American conservatives for failing family, religion, and the nation, insisting they were never anything but libertarians. But is the American future truly to be found in the English past?

by RICHARD M. REINSCH II

IN CONSERVATISM: A REDISCOVERY, Yoram Hazony aims to summon American conservatives from the somnambulant, rationalistic, and individualistic fate to which their ideas have inexorably led them. He argues that this depleted condition results from a fault in their reasoning about nature, namely, the notion that one can locate universal truth and articulate it as the sound basis of a nation's political foundation and principles. Man's reason is weak, he notes, and prone to disagreement, with a propensity to associate its conclusions with universals, even though the evidence does not support such sweeping notions. In

this way, Hazony concludes, we come to believe that our own ideas are really God's judgments.

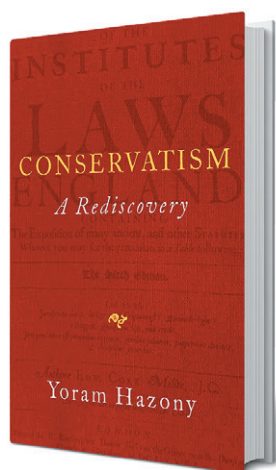
Hazony's scourge here is "Enlightenment liberalism," which, he argues, falsely deduces a universal politics from nature: Man is free and equal by nature, political regimes are founded to protect property and liberty, man establishes these regimes by his consent. But this liberalism is unempirical and a projection of man's reason to create a regime of maximum individual liberty.

The main culprits, among others, are Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. Hazony argues that they

mistook certain aspects of the English constitutional tradition—for example, a reverence for individual liberty—for universal properties and the highest political goods and set out to define a regime according to this type. As Enlightenment liberals, or what is the same, rationalists, they then insisted that this was the regime that mankind should now construct.

Much of the postwar conservative movement in America has been similarly defined by this Enlightenment liberalism. This was nowhere truer than in Frank Meyer's fusionism, which became the archetype of American conservatism. Hazony concludes that fusionism was really libertarian-liberalism.

Such fusionism gave pride of place to an abstract formulation of individual liberty in the public sphere, while depending on a privatized virtue to undergird the use of that freedom. The result over time was that conservatism, really a right-liberalism, could only contend for tax cuts, small government, and originalist federal judges. The public square on culture, family, religion, and the nation defaulted to a left-liberalism that trumpeted its conception of virtue in what was a naked square, never really contested by conservatives, who just wanted their version of liberal freedom, baby. Hazony does not consider that fusionism is not soft libertarianism but a response to the constitutional order's design. Originally it was built on localities and states as self-governing entities with the capacity for more-conservative morals legislation, while the federal government largely focuses on defense and commerce. That order has been challenged by many developments, but it can also be recovered.



Conservatism: A Rediscovery

By Yoram Hazony
(Regnery, 2022)

This explains, according to Hazony, how conservatives could win elections and hold the White House under Ronald Reagan or No. 10 with Margaret Thatcher and still lose many consequential fights over culture. And this unthinking, ideologically libertarian conservatism had manifestly lost the political thread of victory until the nationalist conservative intervention in 2016 in the form of Brexit and Donald Trump's presidential victory. Here was outlined a new path for the right to follow if it wanted to govern.

On one level, I do not contest, nor really should any American conservative, that our effort to conserve the best of our constitutional tradition is an ongoing reflective and discussion-based process where principles, ideas, and policies are formulated and applied to questions that are up for debate. This tradition is surely not defined by an ideology or a catechism, and attempts to do that undermine conservatism. And for conservatives to defend, reform, and secure this republic, we are called to the virtues of prudence, wisdom, and courage.

Some conservative judgments have omitted one or more of those virtues. In one respect, Hazony is correct: Conservatives in America and the U.K. had deemphasized the nation as the crucial political framework, and, yes, Brexit and Trump corrected matters. But it is something of a tale to conclude that Frank Meyer's fusionism left conservatives unable to defend culture and morality from the egalitarian-dipped arrows of the progressives. Hazony takes matters too far.

The author's dichotomies aim to separate the children of light from the children of the confused within American conservatism. Readers of Hazony's earlier book *The Virtue of Nationalism* remember its deployment of empires and nations as the exclusive measure for political forms, omitting regimes like republicanism and how this spirit crucially shapes politics. Hazony judges conservatism in America to be primarily a contest between a godlike reason that produces a deracinated individualism and a neglected traditionalism and its empirical defense that undergirds God, family, and country.

Hazony needs to remember that not all Enlightenment thinkers reasoned the same. Which Enlightenment we're talking about matters a great deal. The Scottish Enlightenment had tremendous influence on many of the American Founders, but nowhere does it contain the abstractions and



Portrait of an early American family: *The Peale Family* by Charles Willson Peale (1771–73)

philosophic nominalism of Locke or Hobbes. Further, Hazony does not engage with the classical measure of reason and the practical goods it defends. The second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence reasons from universal goods to particular problems that the Continental Congress confronted. The Founders were caught having to articulate the good and the true and fasten it to discrete situations.

Hazony rightfully defends family, religion, and nation, and the last section of the book is moving in this regard. But it is also proffered as the authentic account of family and community. There is certainly much to commend in Hazony's account of family life and the building of community. However, the suggestion here and throughout the book is that American conservatism never really attempted to defend these goods because it is theoretically incapable of so doing.

Hazony writes as if the following well-known conservatives did not actually exist: Phyllis Schlafly, a leader of the pro-life movement and the long-democratically successful attempt to preserve marriage as a union of man and woman until *Obergefell v. Hodges*; Father Richard John Neuhaus and his *First Things* quest to put faith and classical natural law back into politics; the collection of groups and activists that formed the religious right and achieved remarkable victories in the 1994 congressional elections, welfare reform, and, yes, the confirmation of originalist judges at all levels of the federal court system. I could go on.

I also wonder how much of what I describe would fall afoul of Meyer's own prudential political judgments. Some of it, perhaps, but much of it would find favor with the fusionist architect to whom Hazony attributes a Svengali-like hold over the conservative mind.

A more balanced look at conservatism would find that, yes, we lost a revolution despite very strong efforts to the contrary. That defeat enthroned

same-sex marriage and, for the time being, has disconnected sexuality from marriage and children where it once held together tightly. Of course, the left's victory on same sex marriage was possible because of its prior victory in the heterosexual sexual revolution that infused divorce, childlessness, casual sex, and pornography into American life.

The fallout from those revolutions continues, blanketing to one degree or another virtually every Western country. Perhaps the contrast is that in America, a viable alternative political movement formed to combat it and even now continues to build ideas and institutions that could be called upon in a country incurring increasingly higher levels of stress from its sexual "liberation."

In 2015, something happened—something that Donald Trump clearly understood and gave voice to. The culture wars changed. The left went from libertarian manqué with its sex liberation victories to legal enforcer commanding that Americans recognize and celebrate its triumph. Months after Justice Anthony Kennedy's ink was dry on *Obergefell v. Hodges*, we were witness to the transgender revolution and its demand for universal bathroom access. Those claims are now even more aggressive, as biological males who prefer to be called women now demand that they should be allowed to compete in women's sports. Many of the highest voices in the land lend their credibility to such reality-altering judgments. Do I even need to repeat what's happened in public schools, starting with LGBTQ pedagogy in grades as early as kindergarten?

We also know that the moment has now turned against the universal victories of the LGBTQ coalition, along with the broader identity politics movement. Americans are resisting being indoctrinated, most particularly in the enforced lessons for their children in schools. Victory against this Marxist ideological front is not guaranteed, but the battle has been joined. Kudos to many of the national conservatives on this front for their effective opposition. And this may prove to be the thread that we pull that unravels much of the errant thinking about sexuality that has guided the West for decades.

But to take up Hazony's argument, if much of postwar conservatism is a tale of misguided thinking that ended in enthroning liberalism, where should the conscientious conservative look if he wants to defend religion, family, and country? The answer, he concludes, is Anglo-American conservatism. This



John Selden (1584–1654)

conservatism is built on historical empiricism, the nation, the biblical tradition, common law, Crown or executive power limited by representative assemblies, individual liberties, and government support for religion. As lists go, it's rather comprehensive and generally agreeable to American conservatives. Hazony points us to its most significant English statesmen: Sir John Fortescue, Richard Hooker, Sir Edward Coke, John Selden, Matthew Hale, Edward Hyde (Earl of Clarendon), and Edmund Burke. Another impressive list. One might wonder: Why did we separate from the English? Hazony does not accurately grapple with the spirit of republicanism, which is the soul of the American regime and shapes its citizens.

Hazony observes that John Selden is the quintessential conservative of this type. In an instructive section of the book, he argues that the 17th-century contest for the English constitution exemplifies Anglo-American conservatism, and Selden's contributions are excellent specimens of the type. This struggle was waged against "(1) the political absolutism of the Stuart monarchs, (2) the growing strength of the Puritan revolutionaries, and (3) the first advocates of what we know as Enlightenment rationalism."

Selden manfully defended the English constitution against its usurpation by King James Stuart, who sought to rule apart from Parliament. James claimed

that he ruled by divine right. In response Selden helped draft and pass the fundamental 1628 Petition of Right, which defended the liberty of English subjects in the face of James' lawless rule.

The Petition of Right established "no taxation without representation" and the forms of rights that would find expression in the Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Amendments of the U.S. Bill of Rights. These were affirmed and established by Selden and others as ancient constitutional freedoms. Coke even proclaimed that freedom of speech was "an ancient custom of Parliament" in the 1590s.

Hazony's gloss on these heroic efforts is that Selden and Coke "risked everything to defend the same liberties that we ourselves hold dear from the encroachment of an increasingly authoritarian regime. But they did not do so in the name of liberal doctrines of universal reason, natural rights, and 'self-evident' truths. They explicitly rejected these doctrines because they were conservatives, not liberals."

Hazony underscores Selden's opposition to unaided reason because the "unrestricted use of pure and simple reason" leads to wild results that are "intrinsically inconsistent and dissimilar among men." There is no universal form of reason that can be used to build politics on. That is, according to Selden, what "may be most convenient or just in one state may be unjust and inconvenient in another, and yet both excellently as well framed as governed."

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Reflection on these passages from Selden should lead to as many questions as it does nods in agreement. What does it mean to be “as well framed as governed”? What does “unjust and inconvenient” mean? What criteria do you use to make the determination?

Selden, we learn, leans on pragmatism here, per Hazony. Pragmatist Selden: “The way to find out the Truth is by others’ mistakings: For if I [wish] to go to such [and such] a place, and one had gone before me on the right-hand, and he was out, [while] another had gone on the left-hand, and he was out, this would direct me to keep the middle way that peradventure would bring me to the place I desired to go.”

We call that pragmatism, and it has one big problem. It does not work. Of course Selden finally says we do rely on higher law to know “what is truly best.” And that source of the truly best is the Talmud, which Selden and Hazony also call “natural law.” Ultimately, Hazony will follow Selden’s lead and locate scripture as that which provides the ethical fundament of Anglo-American conservatism. But turnaround being fair play, we might note that this biblical positivism leads one to supposedly the same problems that a reliance on reason alone produces: disagreements, lots of them.

Did the English ever have a political falling out with both sides contending for their biblical interpretations as correct? The English Civil War. What about the Americans and our biblical disputes, which surely marked how Protestants understood the morality or immorality of slavery? The scripture debates over slavery in antebellum America are voluminous, heated, and endless. In certain cases, they ended in fractured denominations.

What Hazony needs should be apparent to most classical students of faith and reason: the West’s most profound syntheses of how humans have tried to understand the truth about God, reality, and themselves. He is everywhere in need of it, but Hazony seems cut off from obtaining it.

In this book, as in his earlier *The Virtue of Nationalism*, Hazony uses rigid dichotomies that produce powerful political narratives but less than robust understanding of the political categories under discussion. One example manifestly on display is ignoring or misunderstanding classical reasoning and natural law apart from modern Enlightenment reason and natural rights. And we can go deeper and show that natural law found a home in the medieval constitutionalism of the English.

The classical natural law and its participated theonomy had many of its ethical precepts specified by medieval law and formulated into its canons. One study that readers might consult is Robert Reilly’s *America on Trial*, which sets forth the medieval roots of constitutionalism, showing how doctrines of separation of powers, church and state, the executive and representatives, consent of the governed, and popular sovereignty emerge from canonical law and natural law reasoning. They are not merely derivations from scripture but a natural law participating in divine law and forming ethical norms that were drawn on by English constitutional lawyers in the formation of governing law.

Finally, even some of the authorities Hazony enlists for empirical traditionalist conservatism understood natural law quite well. No less an authority than Richard Hooker, cited favorably by Hazony, observed that “the general and perpetual voice of men is as the sentence of God himself. For that which all men have at all times learned, Nature herself must needs have taught: and God being the author of Nature; her voice is but His instrument.”

The problem becomes how these principles of natural law and their reception by common law and constitutional thinking will be dashed in early modernity by many of the thinkers Hazony alludes to unfavorably: Hobbes, Locke, Sir Robert Filmer, and many more. But the rehabilitation of American constitutionalism by conservatism in a nearly post-constitutional age will require more than biblical positivism and dismissing “Enlightenment liberalism.”

Rather, we require a full engagement with the deep resources of constitutional thinking rooted in metaphysics, natural law, and God. John Adams stated this well: “that all men by nature are equal; that kings are but ministers of the people; that their authority is delegated to them by the people for their good; and that they have a right to resume it, and place it in other hands, or keep it themselves, whenever it is made use of to oppress them....These are what are called revolution principles. They are the principles of Aristotle and Plato, of Livy and Cicero, and Sidney, Harrington, and Locke; the principles of nature and eternal reason; the principles on which the whole government over us now stands.” **RL**

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Revival in Babel's Shadow

The big cities of America have long been thought to be thoroughly secular, even godless, where cosmopolitanism and human greed crushed tradition and a traditional reliance on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. A new book says not so fast.

by SAMUEL GOLDMAN

EVERYONE KNOWS ABOUT BABEL. Variations on the story appear in Sumerian, Greco-Roman, and pre-Columbian Central America, and possibly African mythology. But the most familiar version is the one from the Hebrew Bible.

In the generations that followed the Flood, Genesis tells us, the descendants of Noah grew dissatisfied with their lot. Perhaps under the leadership or inspiration of Nimrod, they undertook to “build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” This enterprise displeases the Lord. Noting the implications of their unity, He foresees that “nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.” To prevent

usurpation of divine prerogatives, God confounds their language and scatters the people across the face of the earth, where they form distinct nations.

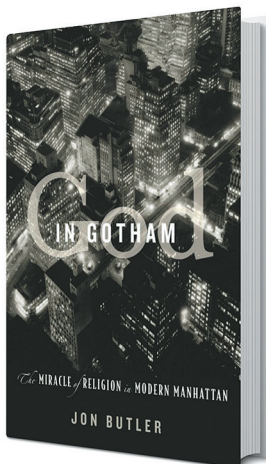
Popular imagination of the story revolves around the tower that symbolizes the human aspiration to transcend political, cultural, and physical limits. But the Bible pays more attention to the city where it is located. According to the letter of the text, the tower is never destroyed (perhaps reflecting encounters with Near Eastern ziggurats that survive to this day). What happens is that the city is abandoned after languages are distinguished and peoples dispersed over the face of the earth. The fate of Babel is actually less severe than the doom that befalls other cities in the Genesis narrative. Enoch, the very first city founded

by the murderer Cain, is swept away by the Flood. Sodom and Gomorrah are burned to the ground with sulfur and fire.

The Bible does include more positive visions of cities. In the histories of the kings and the psalms, among other texts, Jerusalem comes to represent collective holiness. Jesus evokes this association in his comparison of the faithful to a city on a hill. But these exalted depictions are balanced by the prophets' denunciations of Jerusalem as the site of corruption and iniquity. Jeremiah famously prophesies the justified destruction of the holy city, in a sequence of events that echoes the divine judgments of Genesis.

Suspicion of cities isn't limited to the biblical authors. In the modern era, religious authorities and moralists have consistently worried about spiritual and social consequences of urban living. With their looming towers, multiethnic populations, and manic energy, today's cities seem to be replaying the story of Babel before our eyes. Whether or not they meet the same end, it often seems that they deserve it.

In *God and Gotham*, the distinguished scholar Jon Butler rejects this assessment. Opposing the conventional wisdom, at least within American Protestantism, Butler argues that what Billy Graham called "Sodom on the Subway" has been a haven for religious belief and practice. Although it is primarily a work of history, Butler's analysis has a clear normative dimension. A strand of nostalgia that goes back to the Bible suggests that true piety is possible only under pastoral conditions—remember that the Lord's favorite, Abel, was a shepherd. Butler wants to show that the modernism, cosmopolitanism, and voluntarism that seem essential to cities like New York are no threat to religion but, perhaps, its future.



God in Gotham

By Jon Butler
(Harvard/Belknap, 2020)



Abyssinian Baptist Church, Harlem

A short, accessibly written book, *God in Gotham* has broad temporal scope. Butler ranges capably from the foundation of the city in the 17th century to its confrontation with suburban alternatives in the second half of the 20th century. The long period of coverage is important because Butler wants to show that Americans and New Yorkers have worried about the religious significance of the city as long as either group has existed. There is no paradise lost, in his account.

Still, the structure is built around a shorter period that reflects the volume's normative subtext. Butler emphasizes the century, more or less, between the end of the Civil War and the '60s. That's because the early bookend indicates the end of Protestant dominance in New York's demography, politics, and popular culture. Before that time, it was possible to believe that the city enjoyed an ecumenical consensus if not denominational unity. Afterward, the waves of immigration that brought hundreds of thousands of Jews, Italian Catholics, and others to New York made the story of Babel all too real to the city's religious and social establishment.

The later bookend reflects the decline of cities in general and New York in particular from their leading role in American life. In the years after the Second World War, population and money flowed out of the cities—and religious institutions and communities followed them. Butler notes a subtle

but important shift in the criticism of American religion in response to these developments. Fears of immorality and secularism went along with the immigration and urbanization of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Anxieties that American religion was respectable but vacuous, epitomized by Will Herberg's diagnosis of "the American way of life" in *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, were more characteristic of suburban experience. Butler chides Herberg and his counterparts for failing to perceive the religious possibilities of the suburbs, much like their predecessors denounced the city as barren ground for the seeds of faith.

Still, he does not avoid a different brand of nostalgia. Rather than idealizing rural harmony, Butler saves his restrained but evident enthusiasm for circles centered for a few decades on Union Theological Seminary and the Jewish Theological Seminary. God might dwell in Gotham, but for a while He seemed to have a special affection for Upper Manhattan.

Butler's admiration for this milieu is understandable. In different and often contrasting ways, Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Mordecai Kaplan were models of sophisticated theological engagement who also reached a broader public. For scholars distressed by the marginalization of religion within the academy and in intellectual

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”

Jewish Theological Seminary of America, Morningside Heights, New York



life, these figures contributed to a kind of golden age, when religious sources and tradition were incapable features of public discourse. Their appeal, to many admirers, is heightened by liberal politics, which refutes the association of religion with the populism that is both cause and consequence of its present disrepute among intellectuals.

But the same features that make the midcentury liberal theologians appealing to Butler help account for the evanescence of their influence. Whatever their own beliefs, none established durable movements that attracted significant numbers of participants. Part of the reason is that, while they suggested that secular thought was insufficient, they struggled to articulate what insights or principles could be derived only from religious traditions and sources. Niebuhr's presentation of the Babel story, which he describes as a universally human "myth" rather than an element of an authoritative sacred text, exemplifies the difficulty.

Tension between relatively high-brow forms of urban religion and conservative critics hasn't gone away. The Presbyterian pastor Timothy Keller became a minor celebrity around the turn of the 21st century due to his success preaching a "winsome" gospel to New Yorkers. More recently, he's been the target of criticism for being insufficiently pugilistic in his rhetoric or partisan in his politics. Keller is more theologically orthodox than Niebuhr, but still hasn't been able to escape charges that he's watering down Christianity (or a confessionally Reformed Christianity) to suit a culturally sophisticated but religiously indifferent audience. Even without the specific pressures of our political moment, the old suspicion of big cities is hard to shake.

Whatever the merits of Keller's approach, it may be that the most vital forms of city religion are more likely to be found in the streets than in ivory towers. The best chapter of *God in Gotham* discusses the development of a distinctively African American form of urban Christianity as migration from the South and, to a lesser extent, from the Caribbean swelled New York's black population. Middle-class pastors represented by Harlem minister Adam Clayton Powell Sr. tried to corral their flocks into black congregations modeled on the white Protestant mainstream—with imposing church buildings to match.

These efforts were only partly successful. Thousands joined Powell's Abyssinian Baptist Church,

which was the largest congregation in the country between the world wars. But many others were drawn to storefronts where uncredentialed ministers preached a poor man's gospel, sometimes drawing on the apostolic gift of speaking in tongues. It is worth recalling that the modern Pentecostal movement began with the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles.

Religion can thrive in big American cities if you know where to look, then. One reason white evangelicals like Graham perceived New York as a godless wasteland was their inability to recognize the vitality of the black church, despite similarities of theology and worship derived from shared Southern backgrounds. A similar dynamic might explain the low profile of Hispanic Christianity today. Stereotypically associated with Catholic Church, Central Americans are joining charismatic and renewal movements in record numbers.

A related observation could be made regarding Jewish life. While the imposing Reform temples established by affluent German Jews empty out, so-called ultra Orthodox (more accurately and politely, Haredi) communities in Brooklyn and throughout the New York metro area are booming in population and confidence. Despite the biblical suspicion of cities, Jews have a long history of urban piety extending back to the Hellenistic period and reinforced by European prohibitions on landowning that extend into modern times. Long after they ceased to be the shepherds and farmers of Davidic times, Jews have found that education and collective autonomy are more important to religious continuity than location.

Precisely because of the strength of low-status, minority religion compared to genteel movements, though, the anxieties that tormented New York denominational Protestants in the late 19th century remain familiar. With slightly updated references, a jeremiad like prominent minister Josiah Strong's *Our Country* could have been written yesterday. In 1885, Strong warned that the combination of immigration, technological change, and elite skepticism on display in New York were not only threatening to undermine America's status as a "city upon a hill" but also civilization itself. Butler reminds us that we have always lived in the shadow of Babel, here in the city at the tower's base. **RL**

Samuel Goldman is an associate professor of political science at George Washington University.



Booker T. Washington (1856–1915)

A Vision of Black Success

While much has been written about the structural barriers to black economic independence, what has been forgotten or ignored is perhaps even more important: the role of the marketplace and entrepreneurship in black success. We need to encourage the latter without forgetting the former.

by IAN ROWE

IN THE 1996 NEW YORKER special edition *Black in America*, Hendrik Hertzberg and Henry Louis Gates Jr. wrote, “For African Americans, the country of oppression and the country of liberation are the same country.”

We cannot escape from the fact that America’s history will forever be scarred by the horrific stories of government-sanctioned chattel enslavement. But that same history is rife with stories of African Americans who embraced the institutions of family, religion, education, and perhaps most notably entrepreneurship to overcome dehumanizing discrimination and achieve enduring prosperity. This peculiar duality of America is a consistent undercurrent of the new, expertly researched book *Black Liberation Through the Marketplace*.

Authors Rachel S. Ferguson and Marcus M. Witcher discuss how education, property ownership, family, and religion allowed a segment of the black community to rise above systemic racism and achieve true progress during times of extreme injustice and oppression.

Throughout the book, Ferguson and Witcher take the unique approach of applying lessons from classical liberalism as they walk through America’s history in painstaking detail, deliberately exposing the coordinated societal effort to impede black progress while also revealing the power of the free market to uplift the black community. The authors offer this explanation:

Government—at all levels—failed to protect Blacks’ rights to life, liberty, property, freedom of contract, right

to trial by jury, and more. The market didn't fail Black people. Indeed, Blacks prospered as entrepreneurs, professionals, and laborers within the free enterprise system. It was America's political institutions that failed them.

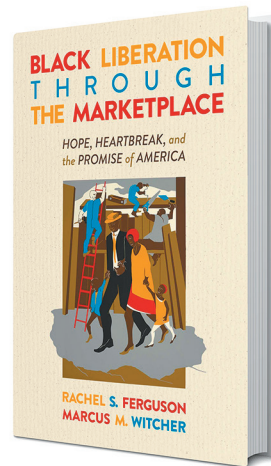
Classical liberalism—an ideology often forgotten in today's polarizing environment—“captures America's dedication to four distinct institutions [through the free market]: property rights, freedom of contract, equal protection under the law, and a cultural affirmation of trade and entrepreneurship.” Specific historical examples demonstrate how these market-based rights greatly increased black social and human capital. During the Reconstruction era, the shift from rural to urban dwelling in the South doubled the proportion of blacks living in cities, allowing the black economy to outpace the white economy, which spurred investment in “churches, lodges, travel, amusement, and savings.” The establishment of the Hampton Institute in 1867 shaped the black literacy movement, resulting in a literate majority by 1910. And overwhelming participation in the black church allowed blacks to “create and sustain thick social institutions” in all aspects of civil society.

Herein lies a core component of the book: While no one should forget the atrocities committed against the black community throughout our history, true upward mobility comes from a focus on black material progress. This was Booker T. Washington's vision of black empowerment, ideas of “uplift” and “self-help” that “refer to the pooling of resources ... for the shared goal of Black economic empowerment.”

Washington was heavily criticized for these views (and is often overlooked in K–12 education when teaching about black activists), but as Ferguson and Witcher tell in great detail, he understood that an eventual campaign for civil rights would only be successful if a culture of “networking, mentorship, and institution building” was already central to the black way of life.

In the early 1900s, struck by the inferior educational opportunities for black children through the Jim Crow South, Washington envisioned building a network of high-quality schools. He partnered with Sears Roebuck CEO Julius Rosenwald, and together they created nearly 5,000 schools, educating more than 700,000 black children in 14 southern states.

With the aid of industrial education, mutual aid societies, and self-help organizations, Washington



*Black Liberation
Through the
Marketplace: Hope,
Heartbreak, and the
Promise of America*

By Rachel S. Ferguson
and Marcus M. Witcher

(Emancipation Books,
2022)

led the battle for black advancement. And he succeeded. From emancipation in 1865 to the death of Washington in 1915, blacks had tripled their per capita income. By 1955, blacks had built a strong foundation over the preceding seven decades to fight, and ultimately win, the battle for civil rights.

Unfortunately, this productive, resilient way of thinking has escaped the minds of many of today's progressive elite who champion black dependency on government redistribution as both payback for past transgressions and guarantor of black prosperity. During America's racial reckoning in the summer of 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, investigative journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones penned an opinion piece in the *New York Times Magazine* called “What Is Owed.” She proclaimed, “None of the actions we are told black people must take if they want to ‘lift themselves’ out of poverty and gain financial stability—not marrying, not getting educated, not saving more, not owning a home—can mitigate 400 years of racialized plundering.” For Hannah-Jones, the only solution to closing racial disparities is massive government intervention, typically estimated to be between \$10 trillion and \$14 trillion in reparations to black Americans.

Ferguson and Witcher do address the subject of reparations and make two suggestions: (1) fund them through sale of federal lands rather than burdening taxpayers, and (2) distribute reparations to poor entrepreneurs of any race, along with actual descendants of slavery or enrolled tribal members. These suggestions, however, are far more modest in scale and scope than, say, Hannah-Jones' and certainly not posed as the silver bullet for African American



Noble Hill School, a Rosenwald school, Georgia, 1925

advancement. The authors frankly note the backlash and exacerbation of the racial divide that would most likely ensue from race-based reparations, while also making it clear that “we believe it would indeed be unjust to coercively redistribute the wealth of everyone to Black people, since everyone else did not (on the whole) benefit from Black oppression.”

In my own book, *Agency*, I highlight how embracing four pillars—family, religion, education, and entrepreneurship—typically results in economic and communal flourishing for the black community, and indeed people of all races. In *Black Men Making It in America*, my AEI colleague Brad Wilcox reveals that black men’s economic fortunes are distinctly tied to key institutions: education, marriage, and work. Black men who have attained a college degree or are employed full time are much more likely to reach the middle class, as are those who embrace marriage and the “black church.”

In 1960, the share of black men who were poor was 41%. In 2016, that number fell to 18%. The data provide a clear contrast to the defeatist attitude represented by Hannah-Jones and others such as a group of researchers at Duke who proclaimed that individual action cannot overcome systemic racism, and government largesse must be the answer. In *What We Get Wrong About Closing the Racial Wealth Gap*, William Darity Jr. et al. assert: “There are no actions that black Americans can take unilaterally that will have much of an effect on reducing the wealth gap. For the gap to be closed,

America must undergo a vast social transformation produced by the adoption of bold national policies.”

It is this part of the story—the defeatist attitude that defines many of those who advocate solely for massive government intervention to achieve black prosperity—that I wish Ferguson and Witcher had addressed in their book. While the epilogue breaks

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Biddy Mason (1818–1891)

down the misguided strategy of anti-racism and the misplaced interest in critical race theory, it does not speak enough to the impact that such arguments have on the rising generation.

Imagine you are a 12-year-old black kid from the south side of the Bronx with aspirations to achieve the American dream. Yet adults who claim to have nothing but your best interest in mind tell you there is nothing you can do individually to achieve that goal and it is pointless even to try. In other words, simply because you are black, the entire country is against you.

As someone who has run public charter schools in low-income communities in the Bronx, I know how debilitating such a narrative can be for a student's hopes and aspirations. The families we serve are more interested in hearing how their children can be successful than how the American capitalist system is rigged against them. They want their children to have agency, a sense of control over their lives.

An empowering alternative can be found in 1776 Unites, a project of the Woodson Center to counteract these debilitating narratives. 1776 Unites acknowledges that “racial discrimination exists—and works toward diminishing it. But we dissent from contemporary groupthink and rhetoric about race, class, and American history that defame our national

heritage, divide our people, and instill helplessness among those who already hold within themselves the grit and resilience to better their lot in life.”

1776 Unites has developed a free curriculum for K–12 students that offers lessons on black excellence in the face of unimaginable adversity. An exploration of Booker T. Washington's Rosenwald schools is included in the curriculum, which has been downloaded at the time of this writing more than 30,000 times by educators across all 50 states in private, charter, district, and parochial schools, home schools, after-school programs, and prison ministries.

Ferguson and Witcher want *Black Liberation Through the Marketplace* to “address the problem at the root from which it sprung: civil and economic exclusion.” Amid the current fierce debate over how American children should be educated, this book should serve as a premier resource for educators seeking to share an honest account of U.S. history with their students. Of course, teachers should describe the barriers of systemic racism while waiting to tell the disturbing record of racial injustice to an age-appropriate audience. But celebrating black achievement is paramount. Telling the stories of not just Booker T. Washington and his schools but also of Biddy Mason, a woman who was born a slave but died a millionaire, and of Elijah McCoy, a world-renowned inventor, will allow the next generation to understand that success is possible for everyone.

In much of our conversations about race and America, we obsess over failure without being similarly relentless about studying success. Thanks to their extensive research, Ferguson and Witcher effectively argue that “market participation is essential for human flourishing” for the black community, as it unsurprisingly has been for people of all races. This is why black liberation—and economic freedom for people of all backgrounds—is much more likely to occur *through the marketplace*. **RL**

Ian Rowe is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and cofounder of Vertex Partnership Academies, a new network of character-based International Baccalaureate high schools. His new book, *Agency: The Four Point Plan (F.R.E.E.) for Children to Overcome the Victimhood Narrative and Discover Their Pathway to Power*, seeks to inspire young people of all races to build strong families and become masters of their own destiny.



The Basilica of the Sacred Heart at the University of Notre Dame

A Different Set of Values, a Different Set of Goals

A new sociological study of the effect of traditional Christian faith on academic and professional achievement offers some surprises. It is no surprise, however, that a secular sociologist sees Christian teens as conformist and uncritical compared with their atheist peers. But whose values are the default in such a study?

by ELIZABETH COREY

ILANA M. HORWITZ'S *God, Grades, and Graduation* is an important book for our time. It is important both for its primary argument about American education and for what it demonstrates about contemporary American political and religious divides. The thrust of the book is that religion makes a difference in the educational outcomes of adolescents, and thus impacts their entire professional and personal lives. Just as interesting, however, is the author's perplexity at the life choices of the religious adolescents she studies. Horwitz finds it "astonishing" that one in four American teenagers has a deep relationship

with God. The decisions these religious young people make seem to her to run counter to rationality and self-interest. The normal path, for Horwitz, is to parlay a successful high school career into admission to the most selective college possible. It also requires "critical thinking," embracing new experiences, autonomy, self-direction, career success, and upward class mobility. In short, it is the set of values prized by secular progressive elite culture.

The religious adolescents she studies, however, confound these values. And they do so consistently, with enthusiasm, and in pursuit of a set of goods



Princeton University Chapel

Horwitz finds decidedly unusual—like early marriage, early childbearing, and staying close to one's family. She repeatedly stresses the passivity, docility, and obedience exhibited by religious teenagers, as well as their conformity to traditional gender roles.

For example: "Teenagers who live for God," Horwitz writes, "may be well-behaved, but they don't see themselves as steering the ship that is their life. Instead, they are more often than not passive actors in God's play, waiting for their next direction." She contrasts such attitudes with those of atheists, who are motivated by "the intrinsic desire to learn, not by the desire to be well-behaved." Atheists are often marked by "confidence and intellectual ability" and are "self-driven, not God-centered."

Horwitz is not completely unaware of her biases, and she explicitly denies any desire to "champion or denigrate" religion in general. I admire her candor in admitting that the subjects of her study are foreign to her personal experience. As she notes in the appendix, "My upbringing is quite different from the teenagers I highlight in this book and I was very concerned about how my personal experience would color my analysis." She writes in the preface that because she grew up in communist Russia, she "didn't even know what religion was until [she] was an early adolescent" and that she had "no interest in the lives of Conservative Christians until [she] was well into [her] thirties."

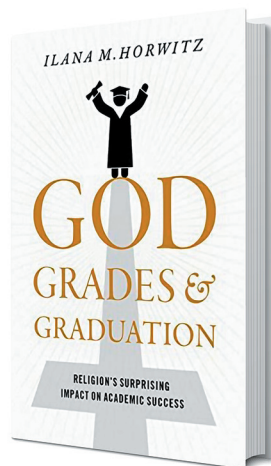
Nevertheless, this lack of knowledge leads to a rather caricatured and limited understanding of the religious lives of adolescents she studies. She describes them in just the way conservative Christians appear in the pages of the *New York Times*: as obedient, passive, anxious about novelty, eager to obey authority, nervous about leaving home, and generally unwilling to think for themselves. In a telling sentence she claims that "people who are inclined toward being 'risk-averse' or 'conformist' may opt into religion because it aligns with their preference for structure and routine."

Her knowledge of Christianity in general is also elementary. She informs us that "preachers in Southern Baptist churches tend to invoke themes of authority, loyalty, and sanctity compared to preachers in Unitarian churches," and that "[a] central principle of Christianity is a commitment to authority." A Baptist "is a kind of conservative Protestant," she writes, and the hallmark of Evangelical churches is that "they affirm the orthodox teaching of the person of Christ as the sole rule of faith," whatever that means exactly. Her claims about Christianity are either glaringly obvious or only about half right, which can make religious readers feel that they are being studied as if they were members of an aboriginal tribe in New Guinea.

I emphasize these shortcomings not to beat up on Horwitz but to make a broader point: This kind of scientific-sociological study may claim to be value-free but is in fact thoroughly value-laden. When one group (Christians) is described in a clearly critical set of terms—obedient, passive, authoritarian—and another (atheists and those with Jewish parents) as curious, autonomous, adventurous, and inquisitive, it is not hard to see where an author's sympathies lie. Such sympathies are also indicative of America's significant religious and cultural divide. One major axis of this divide is between orthodox religious believers, who usually skew conservative and live in flyover country, and secularists plus the "religious but not orthodox," who skew progressive and live on the coasts. These groups often talk past each other because their concerns and ways of living are profoundly divergent.

Let me turn from criticism, however, to highlight the intriguing survey findings that Horwitz also brings to light. She builds on a significant body of sociological studies that demonstrate the radically different college attendance and economic success rates of those from low-income households versus those from professional-class homes. This much is widely accepted in the literature.

Horwitz wonders whether religion could have an independent effect on educational success rates—and indeed she finds that it does. Her data comes from the NSYR, the National Study of Youth and Religion. She designates a particular class of adolescents as "abiders"—those who believe in God, have been brought up in religious households, and who continue to hold their religious beliefs strongly throughout adolescence. Abider teens "espouse conservative Christian commitments, emphasizing the



God, Grades & Graduation

By Ilana M. Horwitz
(Oxford University
Press, 2022)

role of faith in their daily lives and their felt closeness to God, and attend religious services and pray on a regular basis.” Importantly, they orient their lives around a desire to please God, which means that they are generally obedient to the commands of religious authorities and their parents. They avoid drugs, alcohol, and sex, and they avoid peers who engage in these things. They are respectful to teachers, coaches, and adults in general. It is unsurprising, then, that they are well liked in school and that they often thrive.

Horwitz finds that these religious abiders fare quite differently depending upon their social class and income levels, however. Having divided the adolescent population into quartiles—poor, working class, middle class, and professional class—she finds that religion has by far the most impact on those in the middle 50% of the population (i.e., working and middle-class students, or the 25th through 75th percentiles of income).

The educational attainment (measured as the probability of earning a bachelor’s degree) of working-class abiders is *double* that of working-class nonabiders (32% versus 16%) and also significantly higher in middle class abiders (47% versus 29%). But the positive effect of religion on educational attainment is quite small among the poor (19% versus 15% for nonabiders). Most interesting of all, the advantage of religion for those in the top quartile of income is almost nonexistent. A full 62% of the nonreligious professional class is likely to earn a B.A., and abiders are only 3% more likely to earn one (65%).

In the most general sense, then, religion offers at least a slight advantage in educational attainment,

whatever one’s income level. But why is the impact of religion so different across income levels? If religious observance is significantly advantageous to the middle 50%, why does this advantage seem to go away among the very highest earners?

Horwitz speculates that the answer has to do with increased social capital among working and middle-class abiders, which accrues to them through religion itself. Those in the professional class *already* have high levels of social capital. Their parents are likely to work in well-paying jobs, to be involved in civic and political life, and to have had college and graduate-level education. Their lives are often more or less “in order” so that, when a crisis hits, they know whom to call. If someone from the professional classes needs a lawyer, a medical specialist, or a CPA, he likely already knows someone who can help, and it may be a friend or colleague. Children from these classes also know lots of adults who appear in their lives as coaches, teachers, family friends, and parents of friends. They have abundant resources.

This is not always the case for the working and middle classes, and certainly not for the poor. But religion steps in to offer a ready-made source of social capital. At church, otherwise modestly situated young people are introduced to all sorts of people of different ages, in different roles. An adolescent might know her senior or youth pastor, the church secretary, and a host of other adults who attend church with her. She may volunteer through her church and meet yet another group of adults in the community. She will have friends at different schools through youth groups, whose parents are likely to be involved in their lives. She will, in short, have developed a network of contacts and also a network of accountability. All this pays benefits in keeping her grounded and within “God’s guardrails,” as Horwitz puts it. Unsurprisingly, then, such adolescents are much less likely to get in trouble with the law or have children before marriage, and thus to succeed in high school and subsequently attend and graduate from college.

It is, however, the top 25% who are the most intriguing part of this study. Here is where things take an unexpected turn—at least unexpected for Horwitz. She finds that the professional-class abiders often do *not* take the expected next step of applying to and attending the most prestigious and selective college they can. In fact, they often “undermatch”—i.e., they attend a school that is less selective than others that they are capable of getting into. Susanna, a typical young woman interviewed in the

study, “does not see college as a stepping-stone to a successful career...instead of pursuing new experiences or stepping out of her comfort zone during her college years...Susanna sticks to the tried and true.” And her “primary ambitions remain the same after college as they were in high school: to start a family, help others, and orientate (*sic*) her life around God.”

Horwitz does not directly criticize these aspirations, but she immediately turns to a contrasting group—Jewish adolescent girls—who possess much more admirable characteristics. Unlike the abider girls, the Jewish girls are “open to new experiences” and the prospect of college is “exciting” rather than “fraught with anxiety” as it was for the abiders. In the words of one young Jewish 14-year-old, “I like people who are interested in learning and observing—not people who stay afraid on the surface and hang out there.”

Just as interesting to Horwitz is another group of high-achievers: atheists. Atheists, unlike the compliant abiders, are “intrinsically motivated to pursue knowledge” and are “autonomously motivated individuals who think critically and are driven by curiosity.” Abiders do well, by contrast, primarily because they are following a “hidden curriculum” that emphasizes “conformity” and “compliance” over actual merit. Our schools, Horowitz maintains, are shaped by “White Protestant culture,” and thus prepare students for “docile compliance with authoritarian work and political structures.” Abiders appear to do well in this framework.

Horwitz highlights one young atheist, Janet, who comments that the Bible and other religious books express ideas that are “just plain ludicrous...I think that anyone who claims to live their life by the Bible either hasn’t read it or is not telling the truth.” Horwitz then observes that “Janet doesn’t just thirst for knowledge—she also adapts her perceptions and understandings of the world as she accumulates more of it. She’s constantly reflecting on what she has read or seen in her own life to see how it fits or alters her current worldview.” Again: Initiative, inquisitiveness, and intellectual bravery are attributed to atheists; abiders are cautious and content with the social order.

Especially in the top 25%, religion seems to work against the goods of social progress, especially for those who undermatch and fail to aspire to the highest levels of professional success. The sentiments of abiders, comments Horwitz in her conclusion, “are likely to be at odds with some readers’ views of social progress.” In a subsequent, telling sentence, she

wonders how religion can be good “if it places limits on people’s autonomy and endorses traditional gender roles?” I think what might be required is to question the very concepts of autonomy and gender roles—by considering the shocking possibility that autonomy might not be our highest good, and that traditional gender roles might carry some wisdom from the past.

Ultimately I want to offer both praise and criticism for this book. *God, Grades, and Graduation* is clearly written, easy to follow, and interesting to read—none of which are “givens” in modern social science writing. Horwitz has taken religion seriously and asks compelling questions about it.

But I think she fails to appreciate the actual variety and complexity of choices that face young people in the contemporary world. While many of them do embrace career, affluence, late childbearing, and uprooting themselves for a career, others—alternatively countercultural or benighted—pursue a different vision, one that comes to them at least in part through their faith.

Perhaps these young Christians imagine that family, place, and orientation toward God are more important in the final analysis than career and ambition. Thus they choose to stay put, to pursue less prestigious colleges and jobs, to have multiple children, and to stay near their parents. Such choices are not necessarily passive or fearful—indeed, it may take far more self-assurance to pursue such a course than to do what the world expects.

And though the survey data may imply that such people are less “curious,” it may also be that they are curious about quite different things: about what it means to be saved, what the Christian moral life requires, and how to bring one’s will in line with the will of God. These are not minor matters. Certainly I have known many young Christians who enthusiastically employ their well-developed “critical thinking skills” against precisely the kinds of goods and progressive political views that secular culture tells them they must pursue. Horwitz has not yet fully appreciated that religion is not just another demographic characteristic, but that it can entail a complete and radical revaluation of values, and a liberating expansion of the moral imagination. **RL**

Elizabeth Corey is an associate professor of political science in the Honors Program at Baylor University.



The Abolition of Man Postponed

How good a prophet was C. S. Lewis? Have his worst fears of scientism and anti-human reductionism run amok come true? Or did his hope in the abiding truth of the Tao prove well founded after all?

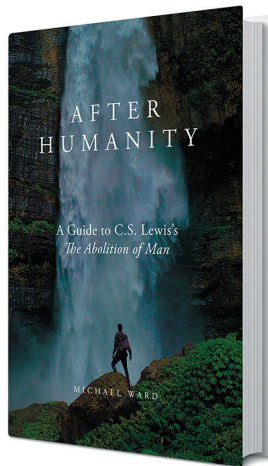
by ALEC RYRIE

WHEN YOU PICK up Michael Ward's *After Humanity*—a 240-page “guide” to a pamphlet which, in my copy, runs to 49 pages—it is hard not to ask yourself what C.S. Lewis himself would have made of it. Fortunately, he told us. In a short essay later republished under the title “On the Reading of Old Books,” Lewis advanced two arguments for reading old books rather than the modern scholars who comment on them. *The Abolition of Man* has now become an old book itself, and both arguments apply.

Lewis' first point is that students avoid tackling ancient writers directly for fear they will not understand them, but in fact “the great man, just because of his greatness, is much more intelligible than the modern commentator.” That note of contempt for his scholarly peers is authentic. Part of Lewis' immense

appeal as a writer is that his warmth and humanity is spiked with acid and misanthropic wit. So what *would* he have made of Ward's *After Humanity*? He would have played with it like Aslan playing with a dwarf—but without velveting his paws. Perhaps the greatest compliment we can pay to Ward is to say he would enjoy the treatment.

The Abolition of Man has, indeed, become a minor modern classic. It is a set of three lectures, delivered in 1943, which make a case *not* for Christianity but for the objective reality of morality. “Natural law” is the term Lewis would instinctively have used for this reality, but here he is straining to make a universal rather than a specifically Christian argument, so he calls it “the Tao.” He defines that as “the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really



***After Humanity:
A Guide to C.S.
Lewis's The
Abolition of Man***

By Michael Ward

(Word on Fire
Academic, 2021)

false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are.” He does not try to argue for the *Tao*, since he believes it to be self-evident, a part of the human condition. Instead, he warns against attempts to collapse objective values into relativism, and especially against eugenic or (as we would now say) post-humanist attempts to reinvent our value systems, as a one-way ticket to meaninglessness. The creature left at the end of this process, he warns, is a mere “trousered ape,” a ghastly simulacrum of an irrecoverable humanity.

As Ward points out, this wartime jeremiad has found an appreciative audience, more so than Lewis’ more upbeat works: We are, in this day and age, suckers for doomsaying. *The Abolition of Man*’s admirers range from Pope Benedict XVI to the ferociously combative atheist philosopher John Gray. Lewis even secured the supreme endorsement of having Ayn Rand scrawl furious ad hominem attacks in the margins of her copy (“The abysmal bastard! The cheap, drivelling non-entity!”). But does this “great man” need a commentator such as Ward to serve as our “guide”?

Much of Ward’s book consists of literal page-by-page commentary, of the kind that Lewis, as a medievalist, would instantly recognize. Some of it is simple glossing: Lewis’ text is dense with literary allusions that many modern readers will miss, although their meaning is usually easy enough to guess. The pitching of some of Ward’s notes is a little weird. His imagined reader apparently does not know what the word *propaganda* means but is familiar with the distinction between “*connaître* knowledge” and “*savoir* knowledge.” Some notes are so po-faced that I want to suspect a spoof. When he tells us solemnly that

the pronunciation of *Tao* “is best approximated by the word *Dow*, as in the Dow Jones Index,” surely we are being trolled?

Still, I have to admit that Ward passes Lewis’ first test. The commentator may not write as engagingly as the “great man,” but he is entirely intelligible and does illuminate Lewis’ deceptively dense argument. Students will certainly find it useful, not least because he has assembled and quoted extensively from a wide range of shrewd commentators on Lewis’ work.

But Lewis had a second argument for reading “old books,” which is that every era, including one’s own, suffers from some “characteristic blindness” or other. When we read our contemporaries, he warns, we are reading authors liable to the same errors as we ourselves are. The great merit of writers from other ages is that they are prey to different mistakes, so we will instantly recognize theirs and avoid them, while they will directly challenge the assumptions we did not even realize we had made. And Lewis, a lifelong science fiction enthusiast, could not resist adding that books from the future would do the job just as well, if only we could get to them.

Well, now we can. What does this book from Lewis’ future have to say about his characteristic blindnesses, and what would he have to say about its?

Ward is a very gentle critic. His pretense of neutrality toward a book he plainly loves is charming but utterly unconvincing. Still, he does put it instructively into context. Although Lewis explicitly argued—in 1943!—that “the process which, if not checked, will abolish Man goes on apace among Communists and Democrats no less than among Fascists,” every line of *The Abolition of Man* bears the stamp of war. Indeed, of both wars: Lewis’ own teenage combat experience in 1917–18 underpins it. When, in the first lecture, he effortlessly made willingness to lay down one’s life the measure of any value system’s worth, he knew of what he spoke. His breezy citation of the principle *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*—“It is sweet and fitting to die for the homeland”—clearly makes Ward uncomfortable (he argues, pretty convincingly, that Lewis had probably never read the Wilfred Owen poem that has made that line so notorious). The lectures begin with a broadside against a pair of hapless Australian authors who serve as exemplars of spineless moral vacuity: In private correspondence, Lewis explicitly tied them to the slur blaming the fall of Singapore in 1942 on Australian cowardice.



C.S. Lewis (1898–1963)

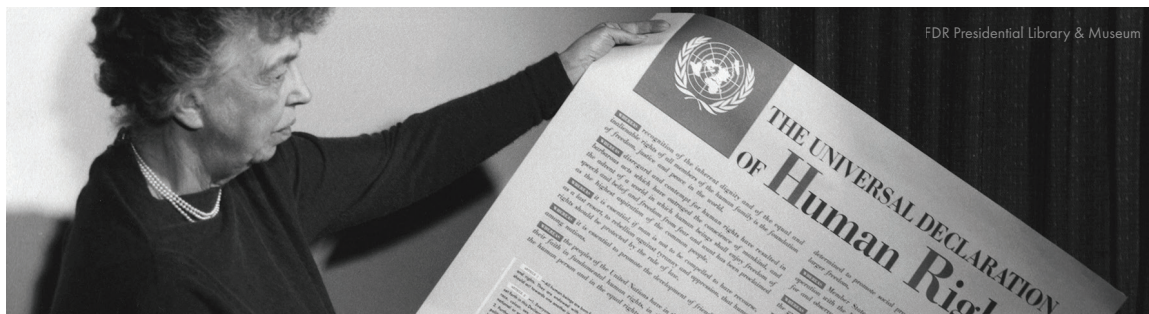
The more important question, of course, is how Lewis' dreadful warnings look nearly 80 years on. Like any competent prophet of doom, he was vague enough to avoid potential disproof. He placed the final "abolition of Man," hypothetically, in the hundredth century AD, while describing it with altogether more urgency than that implies. Ward is ready to find signs of the "abolition" in our own age. The power wielded by transnational corporations is made part of Lewis' dehumanizing process, a view that

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perhaps looks less persuasive than a few years ago, now that we have seen how pandemic and war can send corporate titans scurrying back to old-fashioned governments for safety.

More convincingly, Ward takes up Lewis' lament that we are no longer a rational species, truly capable of persuading each other to accept unwelcome truths by logical argument, and applies it to our own "post-truth" world in which we are all supposedly sealed in our own bubbles of subjectivism. My problem here is not with Ward but with Lewis: His notion that human beings have ever been particularly rational is romantic but does not fit the history I know. Perhaps I am so inured to living in a post-truth world that I am projecting our own age's flaws onto the past. All I can say is, I don't *think* so. When Lewis, through his diabolical alter ego Screwtape, said that, once upon a time, most people were really "prepared to alter their way of life as a result of a chain of reasoning," he was I think describing an ideal rather than a historical reality. I'd be readier to believe he was right if he could provide some real examples.

The *Abolition of Man* in fact holds up pretty well 80 years on, but like any old book, some of its characteristic blind spots have become clearer. Not least—and it is an awful thing to say to any prophet of doom—we are forced to concede that its worst fears do not seem to have come true. Ward repeatedly draws illuminating links between *The Abolition of Man* and Lewis' weakest, preachiest novel, *That Hideous Strength* (1945), a nightmare



Eleanor Roosevelt holding poster of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1949

vision of power-hungry, value-free scientism. It was a reasonable extrapolation from the interwar world, in which post-Christian thinkers offered few ethics beyond flimsy and dangerous cod-Darwinist mirages such as “preserving the species.”

But this is not how the post-1945 world has turned out. It is dominated by a secular value system, humanism, with an ethic of inalienable human rights at its heart. That ethic may be a castle built on air. It is a truism amongst moral philosophers that “human rights” are no more than an act of collective faith. But it is a faith we hold nevertheless. You could happily slot clauses from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights into Lewis’ multicultural list of “illustrations of the *Tao*.” Apparently he was more right than he feared: Universal human values are in fact pretty universal, and if suppressed in one form will spring up in another.

The culmination of Lewis’ polemic is his fear that future “Conditioners” will acquire the power to mold human nature in all subsequent generations to their will. This is certainly conceivable, and Lewis’ central warning holds: *Humanity* will not have such power; rather, a few humans will use it to impose their power on the rest. But humans are ornery creatures, and 80 years of experience suggests our nature is not as easily manipulated as Lewis and his contemporaries feared and hoped. Like it or not, we seem to be stuck with us as we are.

There is another critique of Lewis’ argument that Ward does not want to make, but we need to mention. When Lewis wrote “Man,” Ward assures us, he simply meant “humanity,” but this is the same C.S. Lewis who thought Christianity has “the rough, male taste of reality.” What he in wartime calls the “abolition of Man” sounds awfully like emasculation—or, indeed, deracination. Lewis’ admirable love for the Western tradition had, by the end of his life, curdled into a grouchy conservatism, adept at finding ageless

principles in which to clothe his passing prejudices. In *The Abolition of Man*, the process has already begun. He allows for the possibility of moral development, of new insights—but grudgingly, minimally, in a passage of uncharacteristically flat prose, not enlivened by so much as an example. It is a view from within the citadel, from a man with far more to lose than to gain.

We can (in fact, we must) accept Lewis’ basic moral insight—but, unfashionable as it may seem, we can be more optimistic and more ambitious than he was in 1943. There is plenty of space left for our morals to grow into their full stature while remaining fully within the *Tao*: a shameful amount of space. And Lewis himself—who, even at his most curmudgeonly, embraced the theological virtue of Hope—admits it. In a curious passage at the end of *The Abolition of Man*, he imagines how a “regenerate science” might prove part of the solution to the dehumanizing scientism he fears: a science that “when it explained...would not explain away,” which “would not be free with the words only and merely,” and that would submit to Nature as well as conquering her.

I do not say we have such a science, but since the 1940s we have moved that way. There is less crass reductionism, more awareness that complex systems neither can nor should be wholly controlled, and a more ready recognition that we ourselves are part of that whole. Lewis is telling us that those are morally rich insights. It may be that our greatest bulwark against the abolition of man is to recognize that the whole created order exists not for humans to plunder and interrogate it but to treasure it as a gift and a glory of which humanity is one small part. **RL**

Alec Ryrie is professor of the history of Christianity at Durham University and professor of divinity at Gresham College, London.



The Chariot of Apollo by Odilon Redon, 1905–16

Friends, Not Gods

Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart challenges traditional Christianity in a new book that purports to take apart Thomism and the nature/grace distinction. Does he succeed?

by FR. BONAVENTURE CHAPMAN, O.P.

DAVID BENTLEY HART'S new book takes its title from Jesus' exchange with the Jews in John 10, in which he quotes a line from Psalm 82: "You are gods." In Hart's hands, Jesus' *quotation* becomes an *assertion*: Christianity teaches that, at the end of the day, we are called to become gods or Gods. The book is vintage Hart, full of erudite expressions of a high vocalic register, and whether one agrees with Hart's claims or not, he is always challenging and provocative. I'll begin by summarizing the six chapters of the book, noting positive insights along the way, before turning to my fundamental criticism of the book: its profound lack of friendship, human and divine. Why is friendship important? Because although Jesus never asserts that we are gods, he does assert that we are friends (John 13).

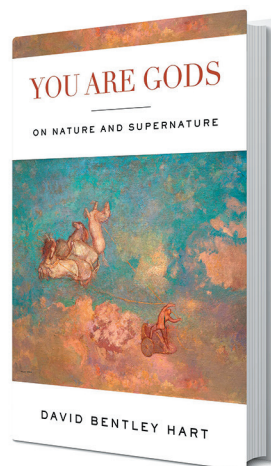
Hart's book is a collection of recent pieces and only very broadly construed as being about the nature-supernature debate, although the first piece does directly relate to that tiresome trial of 20th-century Catholic theology. "Waking the Gods" unfolds as a nice summary of Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac's position, although in the end even de Lubac is not radical (or intellectually consistent) enough for Hart. As Hart summarizes the opposing "traditionalist Thomist" position, which apparently is back in favor among young Thomists, "human nature has no inherent ordination toward real union with God, and—apart from the infusion of a certain wholly adventitious *lumen gloriae*—rational creatures are incapable even of conceiving a desire for such union." This means that God *could* (although He didn't) "just as well have

created a world in a state of *natura pura*, wherein the rational volitions of spiritual creatures could have achieved all their final ends and ultimate rest in an entirely natural terminus.” Hart argues, based on the structure of intentionality in knowing and willing, that this position is *logically* impossible: “Not even God could create a rational nature not called to deification, any more than he could create a square circle; to have received that call is precisely what it is to be a rational being.” Human nature never can be merely *natural* but is always already *supernatural*.

The second essay, “The Treasure of Delight,” continues Hart’s transcendental or phenomenological approach to nature and supernature by applying it to the late medieval German theologian Nicholas of Cusa. “We are capable of knowing anything at all only because the primordial orientation of our nature is the longing to know God as God, to see him as he is, rather than as some limited essence,” or as Nicholas of Cusa says, “Therefore you, God, are infinity itself, which alone I desire in every desire.” Once again Thomists are accused of logical incoherence: “‘Pure nature’ is an atrocity of reason.” According to Hart: “We are nothing but created gods coming to be, becoming God in God, able to become divine only because, in some sense, we are divine from the very first.” But “becoming God” is far more incoherent than “pure nature.”

After leaving the nature-supernature polemics, we get two essays in which Hart puts the Unity of the transcendentals thesis to work in moral reflection. The enemy here is no longer the Thomists but the Kantians, those who apparently separate goodness from beauty and truth. In “That Judgment Whereby You Judge,” Hart argues phenomenologically for the unity especially of beauty and goodness in moral judgments, or as Hart says, “The ultimate criterion of moral truth is beauty.” This may sound absurd at first, but it is not. Hart uses Rainer Maria Rilke’s final line of his poem on the Torso of Apollo (“You must change your life”) to good effect. Standing in the presence of great art one is to be judged rather than to judge, and the judgment is a moral one: “What kind of a man am I?” As Hart says, “The experience of beauty is necessarily also the experience of judgment: not the judgment we pass on whatever beautiful object we might encounter, but the judgment it passes on us.”

The next piece, “*Pia Fraus*” (“Pious Deceit”), treats moral judgment as well, this time in connection with



***You Are Gods:
On Nature and
Supernature***

By David
Bentley Hart
(University of Notre
Dame Press, 2022)

the transcendental Truth (which Hart capitalizes to emphasize its connection to God’s view of things). Is it ever right to tell a lie? The Christian tradition from St. Augustine through St. Thomas all the way to Immanuel Kant gives an emphatic *No*. Hart says *Yes*. The key is Hart’s distinction between Truth and fact, where facts are something like the registering of worldly states of affairs and Truth is the registering of God’s view of things. Hart teases the distinction out by literary example: Fiction is not factual but nevertheless is true because of and not despite the fact. Hart asserts that when one lies, Truth and fact come apart, allowing for one to misstate facts in order to properly state the Truth. “In a fallen reality, there are times when the facts of the matter are ontological untruths, because they are privations of the Good.” Thus, in the classic case, when a Nazi comes to your door demanding to know if you are harboring Jews, you *must* lie to him in order to speak the Truth. I’m unpersuaded by this proposal for a number of reasons (e.g., who decides what counts as “Truth” which allows one to lie? Is the Truth/fact distinction even coherent when not referring to fictional matters? Or is all reality a sort of fiction?), but it seems a novel attempt to justify what (almost) everyone (now) takes to be the right thing to do when Nazis come to your door.

The target of the final two essays shifts from Kantians to, I dare say, *Christians*. “*Geist’s* Kaleidoscope” is an essay in celebration (by devastating criticism!) of Cyril O’Regan’s genealogy of modern Hegelian and Protestant theology as a “return of gnosticism.” Hart’s response to O’Regan is twofold: First, the moderns fled from instead of returned to gnosticism. Second, gnosticism is an inherent

tendency of Christianity because gnostics, according to Hart, get Christianity right. Hart does remind readers that St. Paul and the early Christians had an “apocalyptic vision” and saw Christianity as much more a battle of spirits than we post-Leibnizians see things. The essay also contains a nice reminder that “tradition” is a much more complicated and constructed experience than supposed, “an often fitful invention of willfully ambiguous and hitherto unprecedented models of confession, usually as compromises between genuinely contradictory positions, successfully capturing something of the force of what preceded them, but only in the shape of synthetic formulations that also deeply altered much of the meaning of past beliefs and practices.” For Cardinal Newman, “To be deep in history is to cease to be Protestant.” For Hart, “To be deep in doctrinal history is to cease to be Newmanian.”

The final essay, “The Chiasmus,” is a collection of paragraphs recapitulating some claims made in the earlier pieces, but also adding a decidedly Trinitarian nuance to the discussion. With the advent of Trinitarian dogmatic formulations, “creation...was revealed as being ‘located’ nowhere but *within* the very life of God *as* God.” Again: “It is from this original ‘circle of glory’ that the logic of created being unfolds: a specular ontology, according to which creation is constituted as simply another inflection of an infinite light, receiving God’s effulgence as that primordial gift that completes itself in summoning

its own return into existence.” The good part of this is a reminder that salvation is about incorporation into the Trinity, not just into Christ. The dangerous part is that *creation* becomes this incorporation, not *salvation*. What else could “another inflection” mean when the first is the Trinitarian processions? Thus Hart makes statements that seem as if *we* always existed, such that *we* agreed with our creation in the way that God agrees with Himself in Trinitarian actions. “And so, then, it must also be true that no creature can exist *as spirit* except by its free acceptance of the invitation to arise from nothingness, and by intending itself in intending its final cause.” Accepting to be created—that’s either completely metaphorical or completely incoherent. What, after all, would it mean to refuse?

Saint Thomas Aquinas by Carlo Crivelli



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As I said in the opening, it seems that *friendship*, not *divinity*, is the mark of a Christian according to Jesus' assertion in the Gospel of John, and friendship is a form of loving another person *as another self*. This means, at least, seeking to rightly listen to and understand the other so as to be united to him or her. And this is something Hart fails to do throughout this book. Hart doesn't love Thomists or Kantians or, I fear, traditional Christians, and thus misrepresents them all on his way to a nouveau-gnostic Christianity. Hart's first two essays accuse Thomists of logical incoherence in arguing for pure nature; but his claims are both insufficient and unnecessary. Insufficient because his putative proof of the *logical* impossibility of pure nature is based on a *phenomenological* experience: the structure of intentionality—the structure of how thinking about any object works. But phenomenology can, at best, show metaphysical impossibility: that it is impossible, *given this world*, that pure nature exist; but it cannot prove that it is *logically* impossible *in all worlds*. Thomists are entirely immune to Hart's challenge on this, and the atrocity of reason is rather Hart's conflation of logical with metaphysical impossibility. But Hart's accusation is also unnecessary, for his position is surely a straw-Thomist: I know of no Thomist who argues that human nature is created without grace, or that the Fall from grace in Eden is a return to pure nature. Rather, the Fall brings about *wounded* nature because, for Thomists, *created* nature is a historically and primordially *graced* nature. Finally, charging traditional Thomism with being an "early modern" hijacking of St. Thomas is a bit rich when one uses an "early modern" approach from Kant—transcendental argumentation—developed by very modern Catholics like Bernard Lonergan and Maurice Blondel and applies it to Cusa and the Christian tradition.

The second two essays continue this trend, this time in regard to Kant. In the first, Hart charges Kant with separating goodness from beauty, but as he surely knows, this is exactly what Kant was trying *not* to do in his third *Critique*: Aesthetic judgment was to serve as the bridge between truth and goodness such that Kant himself argued *for* the unity of transcendentals thesis, not against it. More to the point, in the piece on lying, Hart is entirely unfair to Kant in charging him with defending the categorical imperative against lying *by consequentialism*. This is uncharitable nonsense. Kant's argument is not that lying would lead to bad results (consequentialism), but that lying would make rational discourse unintelligible. Whether Kant

is right is another matter, but he is not making an extrinsic or consequentialist argument. Rather, he is making an *intrinsic* or transcendental argument (which Hart should like!) such that lying would undermine the very condition of rational discourse. Hart should know that deep thinkers deserve to be read charitably, in attempted intellectual friendship, on their most important points.

Finally, Hart's last two essays take aim at *Christianity itself*, at least as anyone would normally construe it, for it takes aim at Christ's Incarnation, which apparently is not *that* important, since gnostics in the early Church clearly denied it. And yet, according to Hart, these gnostics are *less heterodox* than Thomists: "Really, compared to the teachings by which the early 'gnostic' or proto-gnostic sects allegedly departed from the beliefs of the apostolic age, much of that same Thomist tradition is far more extravagantly heterodox." This, I submit, is a most uncharitable reading of not only the Thomist tradition but also of orthodox Christianity itself, which through the Pauline and Johannine writings, including the Gospel of John, waged war on gnostics who denied not only the true divinity of Christ but also his true humanity, his Incarnation.

David Bentley Hart has given us here a profoundly unfriendly vision of Christianity in two very nontrivial senses. First, in the way he treats his interlocutors, misrepresenting them instead of trying to understand them rightly. Second, and more importantly, in the vision of Christianity which is presented. For in this vision, Jesus calls us not so much to charity of divine friendship with Him, but rather to something like identity with the Trinity itself, creation being just another "inflection" of the inner activity of God. To this one must say: No, we are not gods, nor called to be gods in a pantheistic or panentheistic sense. We are called friends and partakers of the divine nature, and that indeed only by the grace of God. This unfolds in the raising of our natures to supernatural life as was intended from the very beginning, a raising reoffered because of Christ's Incarnation but especially his Passion, an act of divine friendship. As Jesus himself says in John 15: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Gods have no need of saving, but friends most certainly do. **RL**

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Victims of the Rwandan Genocide, 1994

The Art of Debate as the Road to Healing

The ability to articulate and listen to diverse views without demonizing opponents is helping to revive genocide-ravaged areas like Rwanda. It could also do much to bridge the divides in the U.S.

by JOSH HERRING

IN NOVEMBER OF 2021, the National Communications Association presented the prestigious Daniel Rohrer Memorial Outstanding Research Award for top monograph in the field of communication studies to Dr. Ben Voth for his *Debate as Global Pedagogy: Rwanda Rising*. Voth's award is well deserved. *Debate as Global Pedagogy* presents a cogent argument for and a persuasive vision of the power of debate to affect change within those willing to engage in this exercise. Could debate bring healing to survivors of mass violence and offer hope to war-torn nations?

The theoretical portion of *Debate as Global Pedagogy* builds upon Voth's previous work in *The*

Rhetoric of Genocide. Voth sees genocide as developing out of the dehumanization of the *other*. When propaganda presented the minority Tutsis as "vermin" and "cockroaches" to the majority Hutu community, the groundwork was laid for 1.4 million* Rwandans to be murdered in 100 days. "Political leadership makes pejorative symbolic misrepresentations of an internal public group, and the repetition of these symbolic misrepresentations forms the foundation of individual action collectively galvanized toward the common act of genocide." In a country of just less than 6 million inhabitants, the death of 25% of the population is astounding. While

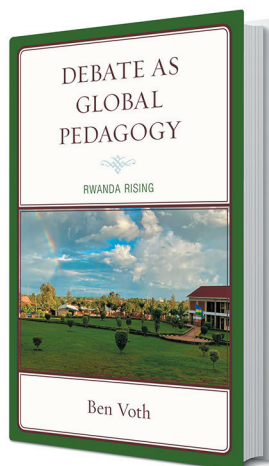
many factors contributed to the Rwandan genocide, Voth focuses on the communication element, contending that a single narrative dehumanized the minority population to an astonishing extent. Preventing this kind of brutalizing narrative in the future is the work of “discursive complexity.” Voth defines this as “the capacity among individuals and a society to endure and encourage dissent.” In the absence of discursive complexity, a single narrative permits abuse, murder, and genocide of the *other* as defined by the narrative’s propaganda. Voth traces the lack of discursive complexity through other genocides in the 20th century history: “The twentieth century confounded us with the most detailed documentation of the horrors of human society. The genocides of African Hereroes [sic], Armenian Christians, Jews in the Holocaust, intellectuals in Cambodia, Muslims in Bosnia, and more than any book can contain add up to tens of millions dead and four times as many as those killed in war.” The greatest need for the global community, according to Voth, is to reduce the likelihood that genocide will occur again by increasing discursive complexity. Minimizing that possibility, Voth argues, is the province of competitive debate.

Voth coached a nationally award-winning debate team at Miami University of Ohio and currently coaches Southern Methodist University (SMU)’s collegiate debate program. He is the Debate Fellow for the Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation and widely recognized

within collegiate debate circles as an excellent coach. It should be no surprise, then, that Voth has thought carefully about debate. He sees it as an exercise that requires students to listen to opposing viewpoints, carefully evaluate them, and respond. These actions occur within a game-like atmosphere that forges friendships through participation, developing habits that last a lifetime.

Central chapters of *Debate as Global Pedagogy* focus on Voth’s work with Jean Michel Habineza and the formation of iDebate Rwanda, a summer program that instructs Rwandan students and teachers in the art of debate. Voth sees this process as helping the post-genocide generation move beyond the horrors of the recent past into a positive future for Rwanda. Where the Rwandan education system previously concentrated ethnic prejudices within educational authority, the cultivation of debate develops within students the ability to evaluate claims, weigh evidence, and respond respectfully to false information. Combined with a consistent focus on helping students to develop their own voices, debate, Voth argues, places discursive complexity at the center of the new Rwanda rising from the ashes of genocidal prejudice. Habineza explains that “in debate you learn that conflict is inevitable, but that violence is a choice. Embedded into this activity is this idea that a conflict of ideas could lead to a positive outcome that can be revolutionary for societies that are recovering from violent conflicts.” Debate, Voth argues, is a mechanism that reduces the possibility of genocide and replaces it with the ability both to articulate and listen to diverse views. Through the inculcation of discursive complexity, debate makes the world more free and increases the potential for human flourishing.

Throughout *Debate as Global Pedagogy*, Voth returns to his core argument several times, illustrating it in different ways. As a teacher, Voth is a consummate storyteller. He describes his first trip to Rwanda encountering survivors of the genocide. He takes the reader into the complexities of teaching the children of survivors and murderers to face and listen to one another; his journey also narrates the rural and urban settings of Rwandan education. In his wider scholarship, Voth has studied the life of American civil rights activist James Farmer Jr. extensively and the way in which debate helped shape the civil rights movement. He describes taking his SMU students to key places in Farmer’s life and in the civil rights movement, working to inspire them



Debate as Global Pedagogy: Rwanda Rising

By Ben Voth
(Lexington Books, 2021)

to see how they can contribute to creating a better world. Perhaps the most powerful story Voth tells involves his work with Holocaust survivors. A former student of his worked in the Holocaust Museum and connected Voth to the Holocaust Museum staff when they were faced with a particular problem: In the face of Holocaust denial, the staff wanted survivors to tell their stories of suffering and survival. Voth traveled to Washington, D.C., for a series of workshops to help survivors learn to express their stories in a public manner. Working with these survivors led Voth to conclude that “I originally thought of the museum as an epideictic commemoration of one of humanity’s most savage acts—a sobering memorial to a terrible tragedy. I now view it as an ongoing heroic story of human voices rising out of the ashes of genocide....The museum has a much more positive message than I originally understood. The survivors are heroes within the defeated scenes of the Holocaust.” Voth also focuses on places within American culture where discursive complexity seems to be waning, dedicating chapters to the rise of Afropessimist theory in communication studies, which claims that any scholarship suggesting that African Americans have made social progress fails to understand the reality of systemic racism, as well as the ways in which the climate change narrative rejects complicating theories in favor of a single, politically motivated advocacy. Voth would rather see the scientific community engage in discursive complexity as opposed to banning alternate views as unscientific. As complications are flattened and opposing views are silenced, the possibility for wrong actions increases. Voth contends that when an atmosphere of free discussion in the marketplace of ideas develops, the conditions for human happiness rise.

Overall, Voth’s book is a helpful contribution to both the field of communications and the debate community. He explores a theoretical concept and applies it to the world practically and clearly. There is room for improvement in a future edition, however. Throughout *Debate as Global Pedagogy*, typos and obtuse syntax reveal that stronger editing would have produced a better volume. At least two chapters are ancillary to the primary argument: Chapter 5 addresses debate within historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) but without advancing the case for discursive complexity, and chapter 8 looks at two different routes Guatemala could take after the removal of a dictatorship. At 251 pages currently, a future edition could streamline the argument by

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removing such adjacent topics. Several chapters are co-written, resulting in different styles and voices throughout the book. Reworking chapters to have a consistent voice would enhance its readability. Additionally, Voth’s argument implies that debate should expand as an educational activity on a global scale. Developing a more popular level version of this academic book would reach different audiences who will not encounter works from an academic press.

While Voth is an academic writing for an academic audience, *Debate as Global Pedagogy* highlights the ways his academic research serves communities beyond the academy. Through his scholarship, communities in both Rwanda and the United States have moved toward greater flourishing, something for which we should all be grateful. **RL**

**While 1.4 million deaths is a contested number, the author sources the figure to a 2015 research paper published by Musa Wakhungu Olaka, “Collaborating to preserve and disseminate testimonies of child survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.”*

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CONVERSATION STARTERS WITH . . .

Anthony B. Bradley

You've brought a lot of attention to the isolation and alienation many young men experience in this culture. If you could pinpoint one or two of the main causes, what would they be?

Two variables account for these trends—dad-deprivation and self-resignation. By dad-deprivation, I don't just mean the absence of fathers in the home but also fathers who have little to no involvement in raising their sons. When fathers fail to embrace their vocation, it tends to have disastrous consequences for boys. For example, boys with active fathers score higher on achievement tests and received higher grades. On the other hand, 71% of high school dropouts and around 90% of runaway and homeless youth are from dad-deprived homes.

When fathers are not actively parenting their sons, it can create a purpose void. Having a purpose void leads to self-resignation. More and more young men are simply checking out. They've lost hope. Active fathers infuse hope and purpose into their sons. But when young men give up, resign, there's no longer any serious striving for achievement. There's an aversion

to effort, an absence of goal setting, an abandonment of the drive to master skills, a resistance to long-term commitments—they want simply to be left alone. Sadly, the internet is there to receive such young men. But online activities—whether videogames, pornography, YouTube, or endless streaming of TV programs—are the symptoms of alienation, not the cause.

There's a lot of talk about the effects of "toxic masculinity," even Oscar-winning movies made about it. How do young men form healthy ideas about masculinity without feeling they must conform to other people's ideas about who they should be?

What resonates well when I speak on college campuses is when I replace the word *toxic* with *heroic*. Heroic masculinity points to what masculinity is *for*, rather than focusing on what masculinity is not. Heroic masculinity invites young men to use their presence and natural strengths for the benefit of others. We're inviting men to use all their positive attributes, skills, and interests for the purpose of making other people's lives better.

The true essence of what it means to be a man includes cultivating prudence, justice, courage, and temperance, thus shaping a life of sacrificial living. But instead of inviting men to be heroic, our society is shaming men, and then we wonder why we don't have better men. It's not enough to demand that young men "not be bad"; we must encourage them to be great.

What role should religion play in the formation of a young man's character? Is it essential? Tangential? Can it do as much harm as good?

Religion spurs the moral imagination necessary to form a young man's character. Religion is the birthplace of a humility born out of an encounter with the Transcendent. It's a vaccine against arrogance, narcissism, vindictiveness, enviousness, and pride. It provides the quality control needed so that a young man does not become wise in his own eyes. Religion will not always tell a young man what actions to take in every situation, but it will provide him with the right questions to ask, such as "Is this thing I'm about to give my time and treasure to true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy?" When a young man's character is shaped by a religious accountability structure rooted in the traditional virtues, he is more likely to enthusiastically choose the good because he embraces and appreciates the value of the delayed gratification that is part of a moral life.

Finally, religious virtue gives young men the self-confidence to do the right thing because he will have no fear of human opinions. The only opinion that ultimately matters to the religious man is God's, what God thinks of him. God, then, becomes the basis of not just a young man's character but also his freedom.

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**HEROIC MASCULINITY
INVITES YOUNG
MEN TO USE THEIR
PRESENCE AND
NATURAL STRENGTHS
FOR THE BENEFIT
OF OTHERS.**
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What book have you read at least three times, and what's the enduring appeal?

A Conflict of Visions by Thomas Sowell. Sowell does a masterful job of explaining the anthropological presuppositions of public policy and conceptions in the entire Western tradition. The book is so useful for understanding today's political and social polarization. **RL**

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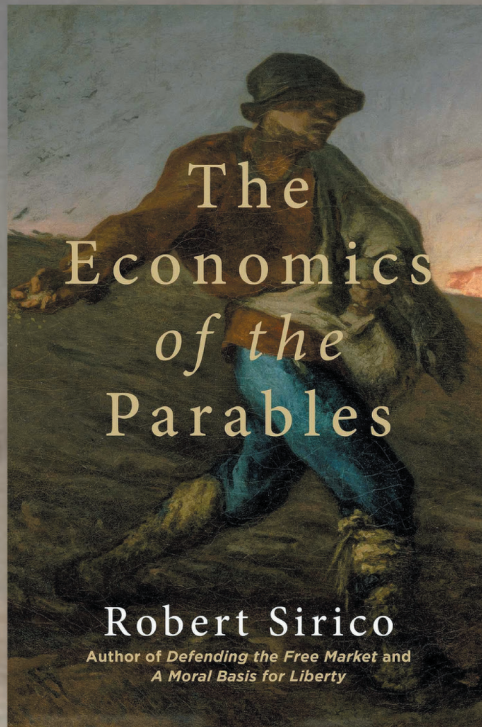
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